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STILL CRAZY AFTER  
ALL THESE  
YEARS

# SPIN

## CHARLIE SEXTON

THE SECOND COMING  
OR WHAT?

## THE ROLLING STONES

WHAT A DRAG  
IT IS  
GETTING OLD

U2/CLANNAD  
BLUE IN HEAVEN  
DOUG E. FRESH  
STAN RIDGWAY  
ERIC BOGOSIAN  
SAM KINISON  
FRANK MILLER  
PHRANC: JUST ANOTHER  
JEWISH LESBIAN FOLKSINGER

IN COLD BLOOD:  
EXPOSÉ OF THE  
BALTIMORE  
TEEN MURDERS



Material zaštitny i pravemi autorskim

# *Songs from liquid days*

A STREAM OF GENIUS  
FROM PHILIP GLASS.



Produced by Kurt Munkacsi for Euphorbia Productions, Ltd. Linda Ronstadt appears courtesy of Elektra/Asylum Records. The Roches appear courtesy of Warner Bros. Records Inc.

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Philip Glass is speaking in a new musical language.

For the first time in his multi-faceted career, Glass has chosen to express himself through the most basic musical form; the song. On *Songs From Liquid*

*Days*, he rethinks it, reshapes it and creates a completely new idea of what a song can be. The result is an extraordinary new album with six distinctively brilliant works of collaborative artistry.

These songs are the genius of Philip Glass flowing through a superstar ensemble of lyricists: David Byrne, Laurie Anderson, Suzanne Vega and Paul Simon...crafted by vocal stylists: Linda Ronstadt, The Roches, Bernard Fowler, Douglas Perry and Janice Pendarvis.

*Songs From Liquid Days* is one of the most important new albums of the year; not only for its departure from traditional music-making, but, for its daring new approach.

On CBS Records, chrome Cassettes and Compact Discs.

This One



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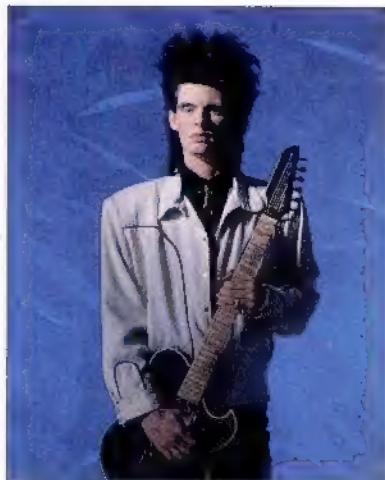
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pierre cardin · man's musk



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Volume Two Number Two

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You soy May 10th's your birthday? It's Fred Astaire's, Donovan's, and Sid Vicious's birthday too, yeah. By Richard Meltzer. 82

# TOP SPIN

In Baltimore young black kids are killing each other, randomly, casually, openly. Sometimes the murders are drug related, but just as often, or maybe more, they are for the sake of it. To score street-status points. To settle an argument. To answer a slight. Death as arbitration.

These kids really are kids—children in their mid-teens and often younger. Some have killed many times.

Barry Cooper, who is black and lives in Baltimore (and whose last piece for us was "Crack," in March), spent eight weeks on the streets, slowly working his way into the scene, being seen around enough to penetrate a little further each time. His report, "In Cold Blood," page 60, is horrifying. Amazingly, he is the first to tell this story—besides local mentions of individual murders as they occur, there has been no media attention to what's happening in Baltimore. Just outside the nation's capital is a dark illustration of some of what's really wrong with America—and no one, until now, has paid the slightest attention.

Is that because no one wants to see it for what it really is? Is it not as good copy as, say, the Atlanta child murders or the Hillside Strangler where there was the sickening but somehow transfixing daily drama of lethal cat and mouse?

You can look at Baltimore two ways: a lot of disconnected murders indicating some alien world of bad streets, or you can look at it as a whole and see the gruesome phenomenon of a slice of our world gone so bad that children shoot each other down, or anyone else who gets in their way.

One of the things that Cooper discovered is that Evil usually has a soundtrack and in Baltimore it's rap. The kids love rap. It's everywhere. It has a virtually religious significance for them. It's the voice of damnation and the promised land at the same time, the music of Heaven and Hell.

Music expresses real life, and if real

life begins to imitate the images of music it is the imitative nature of man replying to his own echo. The charge against Ozzy Osbourne that his song "Suicide" is to blame for the actual suicide of a California teenager is not only ridiculous, it's worrying because it signals a dangerous notion that society would rather deal in witch-hunts than the truth. Even the most creative and original art is a long way shy of man's natural gift for destruction.

Music is not black magic. Music is music: it ranges from noise to art and no doubt perverse inspiration has been extracted from each end of the spectrum. That is not the fault of music. Of all the things wrong with us, our refusal to admit where faults actually lie undoes us the most. We prefer to lynch a problem rather than address it, which is society's lazy way of washing.

What is wrong in Baltimore is a very real, socially complex problem. A lot is the economy, of course, and urban congestion and restlessness, but most of it is the blunt reality of drugs and guns fluid on the streets. Rappers may well be icons to the killers, but they are not to blame in any way. The poor kid who killed himself after listening to "Suicide" had a lot more on his disturbed mind than that song. His problems were a lot deeper. His problems are our problems. When, oh when, are we going to stop making music a scapegoat and face our failings?

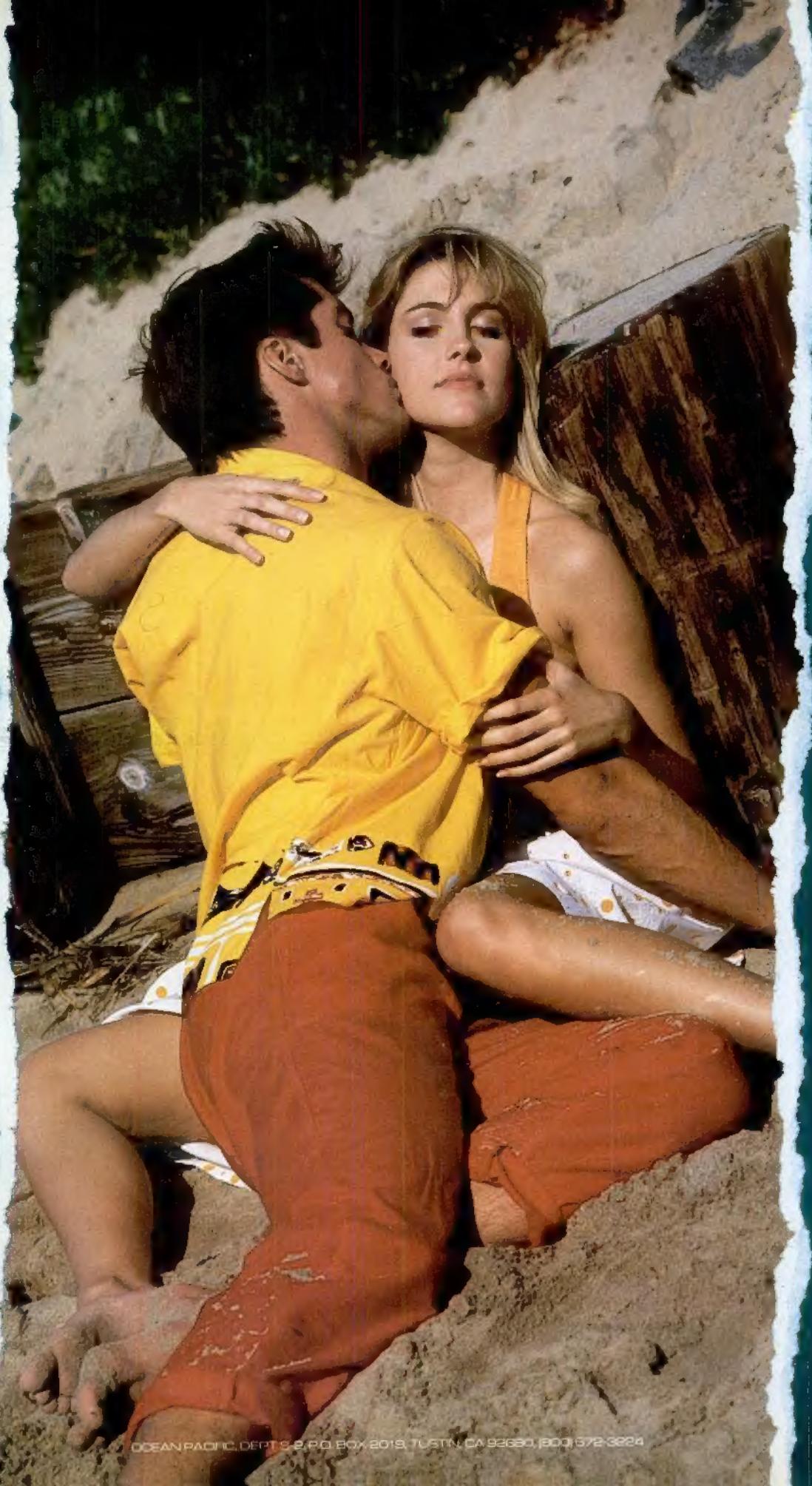
—Bob Guccione, Jr.

**Bob Guccione, Jr. (top left)** presents WICN music director Julia Figueras with SPIN's first Radio Award for Excellence in Programming; **Barry Cooper (top right)** walked Baltimore's mean streets (middle) and survived; **Hunter S. Thompson (bottom)** offers a convincing gun-control argument.



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A color photograph of a man and a woman in a romantic pose on a beach. The man, wearing a yellow t-shirt and patterned swim trunks, has his arm around the woman's shoulder and is kissing her neck. The woman, wearing a yellow tank top and white swim trunks, is looking towards the camera. They are leaning against a large, textured rock formation.

# THE HEAT IS ON



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# POINT BLANK



Monica Dee

## Letters

Edited by Karen Dolan

### Thunderous Applause

The case of the enormously talented Johnny Thunders (March) is a sad one because, as Annette Stark pointed out in her insightful article, he has let many of his prime years be wasted by his drug obsessions. The good news is that he has still managed to put out a couple of fantastic albums during that time. I'll never forget seeing the Dolls lip-synching "Trash" on the *Real Don Steele Show* in L.A. way back when. I'll also never forget Johnny's last visit to the San Francisco area: he could barely keep from staggering off the stage and into the crowd below, while still delivering his usual energy. Johnny has the talent to stand dead sober on stage and kick butt. I hope he'll realize this and become the classic rock 'n' roller he's capable of being. A great guitarist,

songwriter, and still a survivor.

Gromo  
San Francisco, CA

### Super-B.A.D.

It's great to have Big Audio Dynamite on the cover (March), and the article sure made Mick Jones seem smooth. I've seen a couple of "Best of 1985" lists that included the Clash's *Cut the Crap*, and several with *This Is Big Audio Dynamite*, but none with both. These are two great bands, two great records. Can't we like them both? Listen, the Clash was the only band since the Beatles to sound different with every record, to try new things, and always to play great rock 'n' roll. At least now we know who was responsible for what in all those Strummer/Jones songs. Please, stop belittling Joe Strummer. I've been bitching about this Strummer/Jones critical dichotomy to my friends for months.

Karen Trago  
Minneapolis, MN

Seemingly constrained within the claustrophobic aura of the Clash, Mick Jones has found a life preserver in Big

Audio Dynamite (while the enigmatic Joe Strummer goes down with the ship). Jones has transformed his onstage enthusiasm and nifty songwriting abilities into his new project and sounds pretty damn good doing it. It's also pleasing to see that he doesn't take a "suck on this, Strummer" attitude in Lenny Kaye's article (although he might have been justified in doing so). Mick Jones has realized what many musicians fail to: that being serious about one's work and having fun at the same time is not a contradiction.

Antony Saxon  
Acton, Ontario

### Good ol' Legs McNeil

A friend recommended your magazine as being more up-to-date than *Rolling Stone*. He was right. Where *Rolling Stone* lags a good 10 years behind the times, *SPIN* is probably no more than five. I'm referring specifically to your January issue and its incisive analysis of the punk underground scene circa 1980-1981. Unfortunately, that scene is presented as though it's what is happening now. Bands like the Circle Jerks and Black Flag, even the Dead Kennedys, may be bigger than ever, but then so are the Grateful Dead. None

Johnny Thunders reemerges through hell and firewater.

of them are doing anything new, and they cater primarily to nostalgia freaks and to young suburbanites who missed out on the action the first time around.

Even more quaint is the trotting out of an antiquated relic like Legs McNeil. No one's denying that he and his fellow artifacts from the mid-'70s Lower East Side played an important role in the evolution of punk, but face it, they're ancient history now. A fact made painfully obvious by McNeil's Mr. Jones-style visit to CBGB's.

Lawrence Livermore  
Livermore, CA

### Racism

I was bothered by Bart Bull's comments on the white blues boom (April). In essence, I was called a racist because I happen to have more records by the Yardbirds than by Willie Dixon. I suggest Bull listen to the albums made by the Animals with Sonny Boy Williamson and by Canned Heat with John Lee Hooker. If he still doubts the sincerity of white blues fans, he should watch *The Last Waltz* and take notice of the terrific reception that greeted Muddy Waters. As for myself, I shall remain grateful to people like Eric Clapton for turning me on to people like Howlin' Wolf. I shall also remain secure in my ridiculously anachronistic belief that the appreciation of musical beauty transcends things like the color of one's skin.

John Purin  
Duxbury, MA

### Sexism

It didn't surprise me that Motley Crue manager Doug Thaler described me in your pages (January) as "a bodybuilder who looks like a man." Thaler, who's making a living "working" (as he puts it) his lipsticked, eye-lined, bouffanted boys "very hard," probably has trouble telling who looks like what at this point. What's disturbing is that not only does my body have absolutely nothing to do with my ability as a writer, Thaler's idea that journalists are only there to help him sell records is as faulty as his band's concept that women exist only to give them blowjobs.

Deborah Frost  
New York, NY

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# FLASH

Edited  
by  
James  
Truman

## Enka and the Decline of the East



Yutaka Aono

**T**o the untrained ear, all Enka music sounds the same: an endless variation on the same minor-key melody. And so sugary in its arrangements, so overheated in its lush romanticism, that at first it appears to be of Mediterranean origin. But enka is Japanese—one of the country's few pop culture forms that is truly indigenous. Rooted in traditional folk music and driven by a simple sentimentality, it's often called the Japanese equivalent of country and western music.

But it's not quite so simple. Though enka has star performers, hit records, and devoted fans, just like country and western, its real domain is not the stage or record—it's the Japanese karaoke bar. Translated literally, karaoke means "empty orchestra." The orchestra is empty because it has no singer. The karaoke bar exists to give every amateur in town the chance to be an enka star for a few minutes. Walk through the back streets of Shinjuku, or any other of Tokyo's bustling late-night areas, and you'll hear dozens of karaoke machines cranking out vocal-less backing tracks to the current enka hits while customers take turns at singing

the words into a shared, heavily reverbed microphone. Typically, the customer will be a blue-suited corporate employee, or "salaryman." Even more typically, he will be drunk out of his mind on whiskey, and if he's sufficiently drunk out of his mind, he'll be singing with tears unashamedly rolling down his cheeks.

There are currently more than a million karaoke bars in Japan. Once a predominantly rural, low-rent phenomenon, they now exist at all levels. Their popularity among the salarymen is especially significant; karaoke has become a potent symbol of their growing disenchantment with the pressures and restrictions of Japan's corporate society.

In Tokyo's main karaoke districts, down will usually bring the bizarre spectacle of a hundred or so drunken salarymen lurching through the streets while others lie slumped, unconscious, in doorways. Having sung the night away and missed the last train home, too poor to afford a hotel and too drunk to do anything about it, they sleep on the street for a few hours before returning to their desk jobs. Some are less fortunate: they wake up in jail,

or on the streets with their shoes and wallets missing. Still others fall prey to unscrupulous yakuza (gangsters) who tempt them into a night of paid sex and then demand a huge fee in the morning. Unable to pay, the salarymen are forced to borrow money from them at rates of interest that make repayment virtually impossible. Once in the mercy of the yakuza, the horror stories begin: stories of salarymen being hounded out of their homes and jobs by debt collectors, of their wives being driven to prostitution, of their own eventual suicide. Following a dramatic increase in the number of such suicides, the government last year responded with a national campaign warning against doing business with the "Salaryman Loan" companies. It also brought in a new law forcing all karaoke bars to close at midnight. But since most karaoke bars are not-so-secretly controlled by the yakuza, it's doubtful how much effect this will have.

The karaoke business goes from strength to strength. Having begun in the '60s as a cable radio system that piped Enka into bars, it has become a multimillion-dollar industry. Enka songs now sell more copies in karaoke form than in the original, vocal versions. And since there are no singers demanding royalties, they make a lot more money for the companies that produce them. The hardware end of the business has also become extremely lucrative, as the bars replace their standard equipment—eight-track cartridges and lyric books—with sophisticated TV monitors (for the words) and state-of-the-art CD systems. Karaoke systems for the home have also appeared on the market. Practice in your bedroom, hit the bars, go public, get fucked up. Modern Japan.

—Aki Ikuta

# PAY ATTENTION!



David Byrne has recently been knee-deep in the L.A. cutting room of his directorial debut *True Stories*. Shot in Texas against a minimalist/Bauhausian background, the film is peopled with such colorfully ripe characters as the Lyingest Woman in the World, the Laziest Woman in the World, the Cutest Girl in the World, and a neighbor with a Yard Full of Art. Byrne plays the narrator and strolls through the film puzzling over his neighbors' lives.

The movie's music was written by David, and instrumentals were performed by the Talking Heads. Vocals are split between the band and other characters in the movie. The nine new songs are a rowdy combination of corn dogs (rock), root beer (ballad), chili (Tex-Mex), cheese (waltz), chitlins (gospel), and ham hocks (country). Each musical style is a part of each character's personality.

The screenplay of *True Stories* was written by Byrne, Beth Henley (*Crimes of the Heart*), and Stephen Tobolowsky. Among the cast members are Pop Staples, senior member of the Staple Singers, Tito Larriva, lead singer of the Cruzados, and New York performance artist Spalding Grey.

Although Byrne himself has called for a publicity blackout on the movie, other participants report a high degree of excitement. "When David walks into a room in Hollywood now, everyone wants to do whatever they can for him," says one, anonymous, Talking Head. Another excited observer is Jonathan Demme, director of *Stop Making Sense*. "The script was written from a very visual point of view," he explains. "David made drawings of situations and people instead of writing scenes. His entire house was lined with all of his sketches. He was gleaning stories about fascinating real-life people from all of these extraordinary periodicals."

David told *The New York Times* that his goal was to take the ordinary and illustrate its beauty. "I'm saying you can take what's in your backyard and give it respect." Yes indeed. *True Stories* is scheduled to open in September.

--Catherine Hazard

TEXAS

"My lips  
are sealed."

## U2 can be in Clannad





Ann Summa

# NOT STRATE, BUT PHRANC

Susie Gottlieb is sitting on the lawn in front of Venice High School, playing her guitar. It's 1975, and Susie has long, straight brown hair. She's wearing baggy walking shorts, combat boots, a tennis sweater, mirrored sunglasses, a tie. It's what she wears every day. She's a weirdo.

Ten years later, Susie Gottlieb isn't Susie Gottlieb anymore. She's Phranc, the all-American Jewish lesbian folksinger, and she's nearly famous. What happened?

It all started with an album her parents had. It wasn't a politically correct Pete Seeger record or even an early Joan Baez—it was comedian Allan Sherman's folk-era parody, *My Son the Folk Singer*. Phranc's parents would live to regret that title.

Later, punk would really set things rolling. "It was the first time in my life I ever felt like I fit into a group," she says. "And it felt great, because I was pissed and angry, just like everybody else." The L.A. punk bands she threw in with—Nervous Gender, Catholic Disciple—never made much of a dent, but her guitar playing got better. Plus, she lost several pounds of unsightly hair. Phranc's flattop was among the very first of its retro-breed.

Even more important to Phranc than the flattop's return is the current folk revival. "Gosh, about five years ago, when I started playing solo, I wanted that folk revival to happen so bad. And I went around saying, 'Oh, folk revival is here, folk revival's here. . . .' And now that it's finally happening, I don't know I'm so dead set on a revival."

As record titles go, Phranc's *Folksinger* is a shining example of

unvarnished truth in advertising. "Earnest" isn't a dirty word in her dictionary, and neither is "laugh." Maybe it's Allan Sherman's legacy, but the record's most powerful political statement is her matter-of-fact assumption that a sense of justice and a sense of humor don't necessarily cancel each other out. She resurrects Dylan's venerable agit-strum ballad "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and then swerves off toward the head-scratching "Ballad of the Dumb Hairdresser." She also has fun with celebrity coroner Thomas Noguchi, handicapped parking zones, the press, and female mud wrestling.

If Phranc is something of a throwback to the newspaper-scanning topical songsmith, she's something else as well—a swimming instructor. "That's one of my very most favorite things. That and singing. Gosh, to be able to do both and make living at them . . . it's great." In fact, Phranc is a hard-core water person. She wrote a song, "One O' the Girls," about being on the Santa Monica swim team, her publishing company is named "Folkswim Music," and she's even gotten back into surfing.

But right now she's back at Venice High School, for the dreaded Ten-Year Class Reunion. The flattop, the punk career, the lesbian folksinger tag . . . one wonders what her former classmates will make of this. Here come a couple of them now, and they're racing across the room, right at Phranc. "Susie Gottlieb!" they shriek, and grab her and hug her. "You weirdo!"

—Bart Bull

## Yakety Yak

"I was supposed to be a baseball player. I don't see how I ever made it as a singer and musician. . . . Now I think I'll go the whole way and probably wind up in politics. Because I can do so much."

—James Brown

"When I wasn't high, I was in court. You try to say 'Guilty, Your Honor' 25 times and keep a straight face."

—Keith Richards

"He wasn't a violent chap. He was as weak as they come. I mean, he was named after my pet hamster."

—John Lydon  
on Sid Vicious



Brett Wilson

# Whole Lotta Paintin'

Brett Wilson's brightly rendered paintings jump out at you with all the snarly aggression of a Jerry Lee Lewis piano riff. Which is only fitting, considering that Wilson's musical and artistic tastes lean toward the wild side of early rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. Using a 3-D technique that employs papier-mâché, paint, and chicken wire, he captures bug-eyed likenesses of everyone from Sam Cooke and Big Mama Thornton to Little Richard and Screamin' Jay Hawkins.

"This style really lends itself to the subjects," says Wilson, who has been paying homage to his heroes for the past seven years. "When I think of these people, I think of raucous power. It would be a contradiction if I were to make these pieces very slick looking."

In addition to painting the blues, Wilson also plays them with a Norfolk, Virginia-based band called the Blues Defenders. "Somehow, the music and the art are a real nice exchange," explains Wilson, who blows harp for the five-piece group. "I research the people, learn about their music, and that helps me get an understanding of what they're like. I keep it accessible. You don't need a degree in art history to figure out what I'm doing."

— Michael Kaplan

# They Meant It, Man

(The worst punk lyrics of all time)

Kill, kill, kill the hippies!  
Kill, kill, kill the hippies!  
Always smelling foul, they're an eyesore  
There is no room for hippies anymore  
Kill them 'cause their hair's too long  
Kill them 'cause their views are wrong.  
"Kill The Hippies" / The Deadbeats, 1978

I'm too drunk to fuck  
You're too drunk to fuck  
Too drunk  
To fuck  
It's all I need right now.  
I'm melting like an ice-cream bar  
And now I got diarrhea.  
"Too Drunk To Fuck" / Mad Kennedy's, 1981

Look at the world through your polarized glasses  
Things'll look a whole lot better for the working classes.  
"Essence Rare" Gang of Four, 1979

Pawned my records and my stereo  
Ripped up my tickets to see ELO  
And I say: destroy all music  
And I say: you just can't use it.  
"Destroy All Music" / Weirdos, 1979

Freddy tried to strangle me  
With my plastic copper beads  
But I hit him back  
With my pet rat.  
"I Can't Do Anything" / Ray Speo, 1978

The Emperor proclaim  
Us the masters, we rule the game  
Saturation—we want it in taxes  
Flagellation—we've got gashes.  
"Forming" / The Germs, 1977

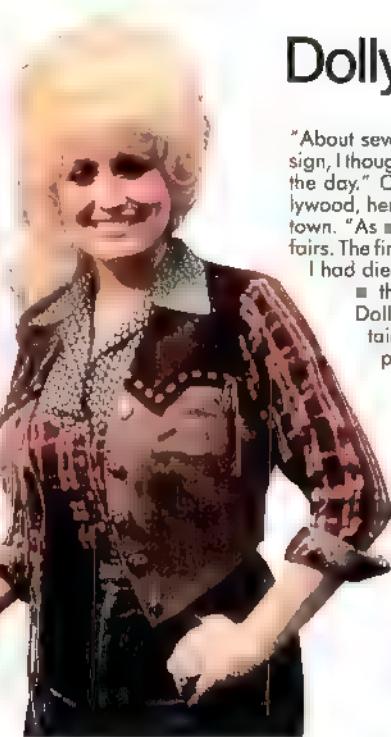
Too much speed, I can't keep my eyes closed  
Too much speed, got no respect for my nose  
I guess I really fooled you: I was using my thumb  
The truth of the matter is I can't come.  
"I Can't Come" / Sniveling Shits, 1977

I don't even know what tomorrow will bring  
Having no future, it's a terrible thing  
Standing around just waiting for caviar  
I don't take drugs and I don't like beer.  
"Right To Work" / Chelsea, 1977

Everyone has their price  
And you too will learn  
To live the lie  
Aggression  
Competition  
Ambition  
Consumer fascism.  
"We Are All Prostitutes" / The Pox Group, 1979

We're told, then we're sold  
Affections, Conspiracy,  
Life is so meaningful with pop sensibilities.  
"Love Is Just A Tool" / The Middle Class, 1978

— Jon Savage



## Dollywood: The Wait Is Over

"About seven years ago," says Dolly Parton, "when I first saw the Hollywood sign, I thought how wonderful it would be if I could change the 'H' to a 'D' just for the day." On May 3, Dolly will be in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, to open Dollywood, her own theme park, just down Route 441 from Sevierville, her hometown. "As a child, every year the biggest thrill in our lives was going to county fairs. The first time I went to Disneyland, which was when I was grown up, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. So it was natural that I would want to bring

a theme amusement park to my part of the country."

Dollywood is a joint venture between Dolly Parton and Herschend Entertainment, which spent \$5 million converting it from an existing theme park. New additions to the 40-acre site include a restaurant called

Aunt Granny's Dixie Fixins (Dolly's nieces and nephews call her Aunt

Granny), the Parton Family Back Porch Theater (whose stage will be a re-creation of the house Dolly was raised in), Apple Jack's Mill (named after Dolly's song "Apple Jack"), a mountain music shop, and a gift shop selling a Dollywood line of clothing. Dolly has so far approved T-shirts, caps, and ceramic cups and plates to be sold bearing her picture, but she expects the center of attention for her fans to be the museum, "which tells my story and features my memorabilia." The Dolly Parton Story Building will display exhibits personally selected by Dolly, including gowns, wigs, and "the coat of many colors that my mama made for me."

But will Dollywood be dealing with Dolly's natural endowments? "Nope," says Dan Rahman, Herschend's head of marketing. "Not at all. We are a family company. We're basically dealing with the good times of Dolly, the fun side of Dolly, her roots, her music."

—Sue Cummings

# Playing Hangman



## HERE COMES THE KNIGHT

**T**his is the scene in which the Joker feeds poisoned cotton candy to a troop of Boy Scouts," chuckles Frank Miller, displaying a sheet of rough layouts from his latest big project — a four-part, 200-page work called *The Dark Knight Returns*. It's a revisionist pop epic about Batman's middle-aged return from a brooding retirement. The series takes place sometime early in the next century, but it revives the violent film noir tone of the '40s. Miller explains: "I'm emphasizing his more malign qualities." He indicates some horizontal squiggles in the next panel: "Those are the dead boy scouts."

Miller began shaking the insular, inbred world of comics in 1979 when, at the tender age of 22, he moved to Manhattan from Vermont to take over the drawing chores on Marvel's long-running *Daredevil* series. Though he looked back to such idols as Will Eisner (creator of *The Spirit*), his style was immediately distinctive. He sliced the page space into thin slivers, shattered it, threw thick shadows across it at extreme, expressionistic angles. "This is not illustration," Miller asserts of his boldly stylized approach to the medium. "This is cartooning."

When Miller took over the writing of *Daredevil* a year later, he brought the storytelling into even tighter congruence with his drawing, spinning intense underbelly-of-the-city yarns full of mixed motives, petty thugs, seductive female assassins, and bands of marauding Ninja. He left Marvel in 1983, jumping over to the company's chief rival, DC Comics, to create the six-part *Ronin*, a futuristic exploration of his favorite Japanese martial-arts motifs.

Though Miller is again working on four *Daredevil*-related projects, it's the freewheeling *Batman* miniseries, which debuted last month, that will probably make the biggest splash. Miller's violent, no-batshit approach reanimates the Caped Crusader as a killer, a vigilante, a figure of controversy hunted by the authorities, a stalking beast of the urban jungle. Now in middle age, Bruce Wayne's alter ego won't leave him in peace: "In my gut," says Bruce, "the creature writhes and snarls and tells me what I need."

"My Batman series has a really grim portrait of how the world works," explains Miller. "One of the reasons comics aren't doing as well as they used to is that the characters are completely out of date, particularly in social and political terms. We live in frightening times, yet these superhero comics give a benevolent picture of the world."

Miller calls Batman a "demon," if he's not even human anymore: "I went so far as to make the non-Batman personality of Bruce Wayne essentially the character of a man who's a werewolf. Bruce refers to himself as a "host body" at one point. I have his Batman side speak to him as if it were a separate entity, saying things like, 'I am your soul. You try to drown me out, but your voice is weak.'

If Bruce Wayne is 50 years old, *Dark Knight* must be a futuristic story. "Actually it isn't, though technically it has to be set in the future because the story ignores the current *Batman* continuity. But for me it's specifically contemporary. The presi-



Mark LIDDELL

dent in it is a not-very-carefully-disguised parody of Reagan. One of the main themes is that we live in an aheroc age. Batman's being out of place is an important part of the story. Everything he does is illegal, he's up against authority. It culminates with Batman having to fight Superman, who is also in his 50s. But Batman isn't a reactionary, he's a radical. The only conservative character in the series is Superman, who takes his orders directly from the president and helps track down welfare violators."

— Brian Cronenworth



The Men They Couldn't Hang take their name from a 19th-century Englishman called John Lee, who achieved notoriety when he was hanged three times for a crime he didn't commit, and survived each time. These Men They Couldn't Hang also show early signs of durability. Formed in London two years ago from a motley collection of street entertainers and ex-punks, the band started off with an unlikely repertoire of traditional folk songs, Scottish numbers like "Donald Where's Yer Troosers?" and such kitsch Western anthems as "Rowdy" and "High Noon." Then they discovered that not only could they sing and play like pros, but they could write songs as well.

They signed with Elvis Costello's Imp label, and released another cover version, of Eric Bogle's antiwar song, "The Green Fields of France." It became one of the most popular independent singles ever — some feat for a folk song that clocked in at seven minutes and moved at a funereally slow pace.

Its follow-up was the band's own "Ironmasters," a song that dealt with a 19th-century trade union uprising and that came to be linked with the 1984 British miners' strike. It moved faster, and established the band's signature sound — a fiery synthesis of rock and folk, harnessing the power of early punk to a broader set of more personal, indigenous influences. With its mixture of folk-styled ballads, speed-crazed punk songs, and classic beat-pop, *Night of a Thousand Candles*, the band's debut album, puts them alongside the Pogues at the vanguard of new, back-to-the-roots British rock.

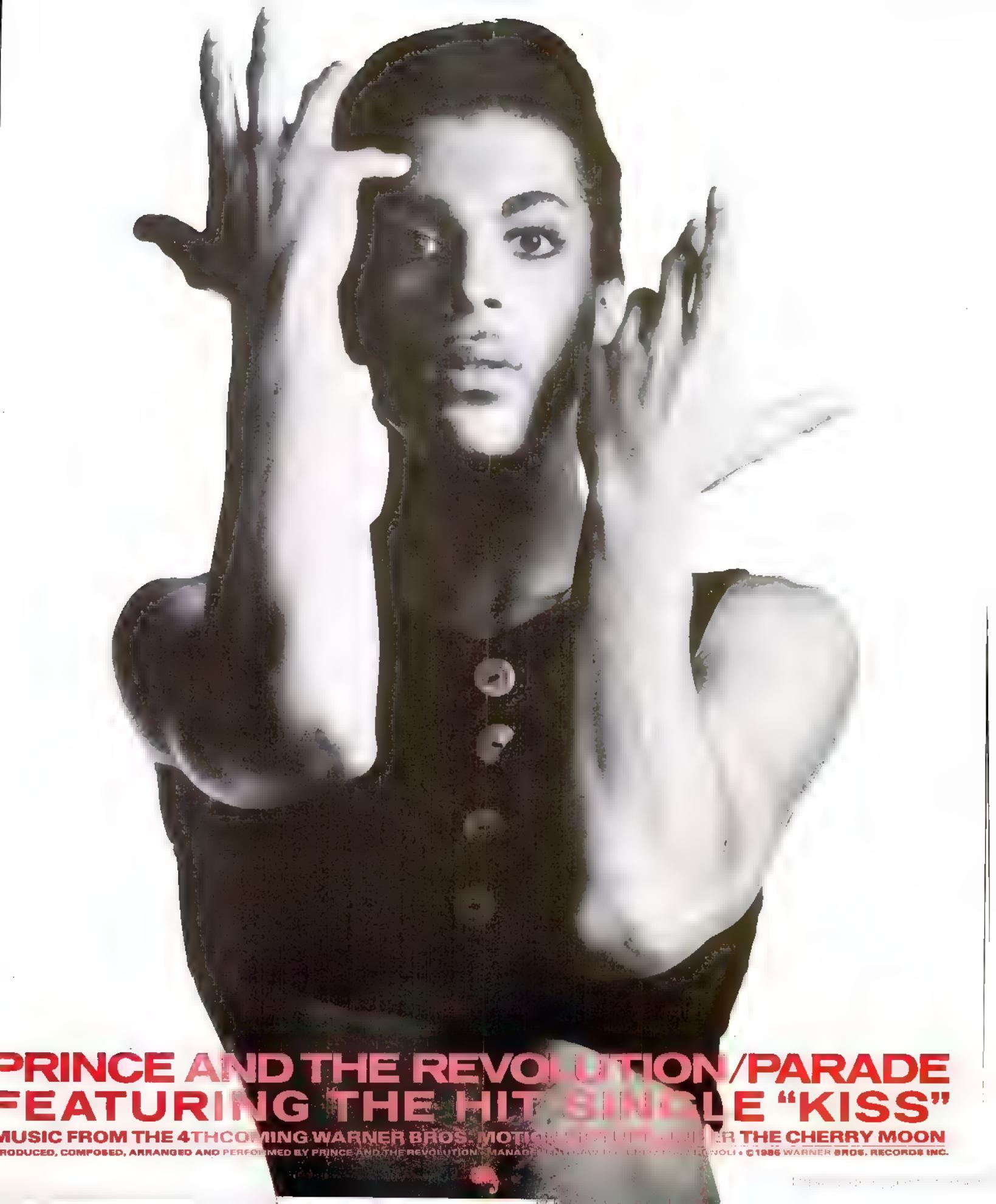
"We get people coming up and asking us to do Clash and Sex Pistols songs," says Cush, one of the band's two lead singers. "But 'Ironmasters' is as much about what we want to say as 'White Riot' was for the Clash. The feeling's the same, it comes from the heart. And we don't want to end up like one of those ranting punk bands, shouting 'The police are bastards.' We do that between songs!"

The Men They Couldn't Hang are planning to come to America this year. And, Cush says, "If they won't let us in, we'll go and play in Cuba instead."

— David Quantick



JIM ANDREW



# PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION/PARADE FEATURING THE HIT SINGLE "KISS"

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John Leland

# Trouble and Strafe

Imagine a flickering, sepia-tinted newsreal: a one-man independent record company, a sharp-witted combination of music lover and grinning snake-oil salesman. Peddling his latest "race" record out of the trunk of his car, for cash on barrelhead.

He pulls a disc from its plain white sleeve to play it for a suspicious retailer. We hear a crisp electronic synthesis of funk, reggae, and hip hop. "Y'all want this party started, right?" asks the singer, over a percolating drum machine. The retailer, satisfied, parts with his cash.

But there's something wrong with this scene. They didn't make records like this back then. Or they don't sell them like this now. Though sometimes they do. The groove blaring out of this anachronism belongs to "Set It Off," the debut single by a Brooklyn artist named Strafe. Cheaply recorded and badly mixed, "Set It Off" rode the club charts for almost a year before breaking into the sales charts last year. That's because you could only buy it out of the trunk of the record company president's car.

Strafe, born Steven Standard in Brooklyn 30 years ago, wears his hair like a Star of David and makes intricate, idiosyncratic street records. His bizarre adventures in the black independent music industry read like something out of another era.

He played all the instruments on "Set It Off" and cut the record for a new label called Jus Born. In order to keep expenses low, Jus Born pressed 1,000 copies at a time and sold them only for cash up front—out of president George Logios's car trunk. This kept the record in demand by keeping it scarce. Disc jockeys, following lead of Jellybean Benitez, played it to death because their audiences couldn't find it to play at home.

Strafe hated the record. "I was ashamed of the mix," he says. Refusing to perform clubs supported it, took off for Europe as guitarist in Shannon's backup band. Undaunted, the mavericks Jus Born sent a dance group out to Strafe to perform the song. "That really upset me," he says. "Here I am getting my break as Strafe, and all of a sudden someone takes it and puts this image out there with an eliminate performer taking the lead. And then it's like, 'OK, Strafe's gay! You know, rumors and everything. I just saw my whole concept of Strafe ripped apart. I'd show up at gigs to stake my claim.' The dance group, of course, was a short-term measure. Jus Born recut the record with a manufactured group called the Harlequin IV and sent it out to promote both records. It worked.

You couldn't repeat this success if you tried. Unless, that is, you found a performer as weirdly right as Strafe. But you could never do that. An unlikely bundle of contradictions, he has elaborately sculpted hair, but keeps it tucked under a beret except while performing. He spends full days alone in the studio making music that celebrates social situations. He instills his hedonist records with subliminal religious messages. His three singles—"Set It Off," "React," "Comin' From Another Place"—and his upcoming album sound like a cross between *Bitches Brew*, *Augustus Pablo*, and *Whodini*.

"I feel like a painter working with montages," he says. "It's like a coloring book. The freedom of jazz is synonymous with the freedom of dance. I also like the abrasiveness of Led Zeppelin. I just try to tune in to what's happening around me. I've been living in downtown Brooklyn for eight years now, and it's just the vibe of the shopping area, people passing from different cultures: the Indians, the Orientals, Jews, Arabs, Moslems. I'm turning off my TV and just listening to the environment."

—John Leland

## Stan Ridgway's Twisted Charm

Pop music's intelligentsia claims Stan Ridgway as one of its own—seeing that no one else has really tried, maybe they have that right. After all, he did helm one of the intelligentsia's favorites, *Wall of Voodoo*, until his defection in 1983. But Stan's only about half intelligentsia himself; the other half isn't quite as polyconceptual. "Like I was reading the annual *Village Voice* Pazz and Jop Poll article," he's saying. "God, it's so Byzantine. It was like, hey, I understand what you're saying, but my God! Have a drink!"

Unlike several notably gifted and literate songsmith/one-man-band types, Ridgway is genuinely polite. He has been answering all the stock-issue queries about *The Big Heat*, his first solo LP, about the studio he has built in the seamier stretch of Hollywood, about his vocal track on last year's Kurt Weill LP, about his collaboration last year with Stewart Copeland. Still, he shows little impatience.

"So do you wanna ask why I left *Wall of Voodoo*? Gosh, it was so long ago... I'm at the point now in interviews where I can ask the questions as well as answer them for the *Voodoo* section." When told the *Voodoo* section could be very tiny this time, Ridgway's surprisingly handsome face creases in a surprised smile. "OK. Leaving was a matter of growth." End of old story. As for the first episodes of the new one, the intelligentsia hasn't yet decided if *The Big Heat* works or not. Much of the debate is over the lyrics, which are short stories as much as librettos. If he didn't have melodies constantly emigrating from his head, Stan Ridgway probably would have become a legit fiction writer—his gift for telling tales, linear and otherwise, is really remarkable. Remarkable, too, is his apparent compassion for the characters he creates. As *Big Heat* makes clear, Stan knows how profoundly twisted human beings can be. "And yet I'm very naive in a lot of ways. I like everybody. And incidentally, I expect them to like me back." As a music man, however, Ridgway expects the mixed reactions he's getting, not only to the album's tall, dark tales, but also to its genuinely weird progeny of synth-pop normalcy and free jazz/blues/everything-but-the-kitchen-sink complexity. Very few musicians, by nature, so well suited for a life of both revered semi-abscurity and chart-

verified semi-fame. Ridgway really is both elitist and Everyman, and he knows how many people distrust that kind of dual citizenship. "It's taken me a long time to actually realize that in some ways I have a tendency to polarize people. No matter what I say or do, about 50 percent of the people aren't going to like it." He shrugs his slender shoulders and grins. "So at some point in life you might just as well decide to be who you are. And after that decision, you're going to be getting the same ratio of approval versus disapproval that you got when you were looking it."

But where some have bravely accepted this cosmic ratio by ignoring the naysayers, Ridgway is quite interested in listening to both the boos and the applause. "It pushes things along faster. You can't create in a vacuum. They've done experiments with NASA astronauts, putting them in enclosures for, like, two months. They come out hallucinating and all misanthropic. The human race is terrible!" Stan Ridgway (politely, of course) begs to differ. —Laura Fissinger



Scott Lundgren



## Temple of Zoom

"Of course, pop music itself is as dead as easel painting," Julian Temple is saying. "And so is the idea that youth culture means anything. It hasn't since 1980, and I doubt it ever will again." But Temple says a lot of things like that. Like many pop theorists of his generation, he regarded punk's self-destructive fury as the final, apocalyptic act in the 25-year drama of rock 'n' roll rebellion—which may be pushing theory a little too hard. But one listens to Temple anyway, because he is unusually well-positioned to know.

As an unemployed film student in London in 1976, he hooked in early to the Sex Pistols, becoming their official filmmaker. At the outset it was just scraps of concert footage, but it led him to write and direct the band's epitaph, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*—a smart, sharp, funny movie which (to John Lydon's disgust) portrayed the Sex Pistols as an ingenious marketing scam thought up by manager Malcolm McLaren.

There is more than a little of McLaren in Temple himself. Smooth, articulate, a would-be subversive with both eyes on the mainstream, he is a determined, self-confessed strategist. When, after the release of the *Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, he failed to get financing for another feature—"The film companies had no idea what I was about; they thought I'd come in and spit on the carpet"—he moved into rock video production. "I knew that videos were going to be big. I used them as a way of learning at record companies' expense. I had no objection to spending their money." While making videos for, among others, ABC ("Poison Arrow"), David Bowie ("Blue Jean"), the Rolling Stones ("Undercover"), and Mick Jagger ("Just Another Night"), he began to set other projects in motion; notably, his idea for a lavish musical based on an obscure British youth-cult novel called *Absolute Beginners*, written in the late '50s by Colin MacInnes.

"First of all I had to hype the book, to try and make it fashionable, before I could

raise capital," he says. "It wasn't all easy. The people who run the film business are all from the '60s, and they don't particularly like to see that period in history."

Nevertheless, the first part of Temple's strategy worked well; plugging the book relentlessly, he saw it grow from a little-known, out-of-print rarity to the widely accepted bible of British youth culture. By the time the movie had gone into production last year, *Absolute Beginners* was skirting the edges of the best-seller list.

Temple's casting was also strategically brilliant. The film stars David Bowie (who also performs the title song), Ray Davies, James Fox, Sade and Mandy Rice-Davies (protagonist of a sex scandal which toppled the British government in 1963) in roles which draw playful resonances from their real-life characters. Bowie, for example, is cast as Vendice Partners, an immoral admiral. Says Temple, "I liked the idea of him playing a kind of devil. He has always been a manipulator of sorts, a figure who stands for the corruption of youth culture."

The cinematic model for *Absolute Beginners* was the kind of '40s Hollywood musical which Temple grew up admiring. "Very hard Technicolor, a lot of sinuous camera movements, that kind of thing." But its message is intended to be more modern. "I'd like it to be a definitive statement on this phenomenon of youth culture. Britain's strength in music and style has fascinated the rest of the world since the war, and this film is really about the birth of that. Kids then were turning the world upside down. They were something more than just consumers, buying whatever happens to be on sale that week."

*Absolute Beginners* is scheduled to open across America in late April. Advance word has it as either a visually dazzling, enormously entertaining new-age masterpiece or as a hollow, overextended rock video. In the name of subversive marketing, Temple may have started both rumors himself.

—James Truman



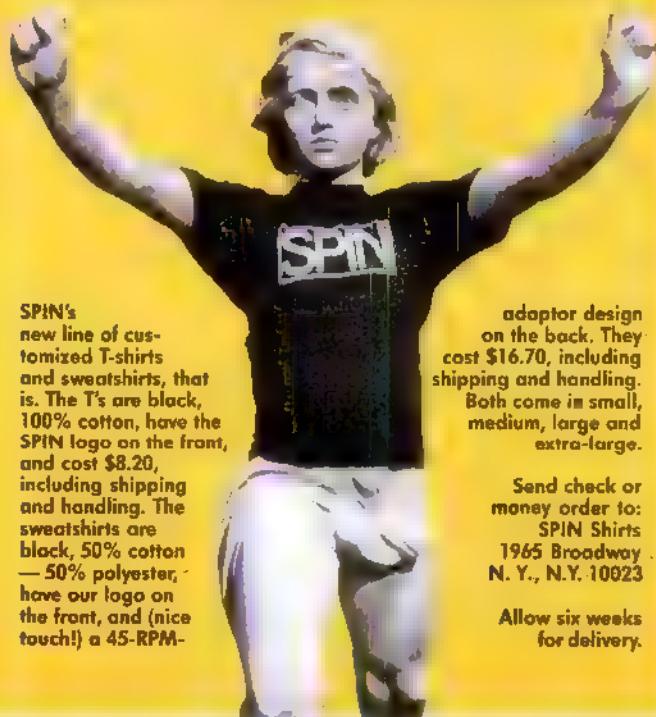
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# FLASHES

All systems **go-go**. After a year's delay, a doubled budget, and much-rumored production problems, *Good to Go*, the movie that **blows the lid off** D.C.'s go-go music scene, is now scheduled for national release in July. "It was all my fault," says writer-director Blaine Novak. "I'm kind of **slow**."

It's probably **Freud's** fault. Executives at Tri-Star Pictures are in a dither over how to promote their forthcoming film *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. "We don't want people to think it's about sex," says a spokeswoman. But why would they? Obviously, it's about **Chicago**.

**Bruce Springsteen** is tired of being referred to as The Boss. Or at least someone identifying himself as Bruce recently called MTV and asked that they just **call him Bruce**. MTV's response? "**Yes, Boss**."

The music industry continues to be **rocked to its foundations** by revelations that independent record promoters use bribes, including **cash, cocaine, and sex**, to get exposure for their artists. (For future information: **SPIN** is located at 1965 Broadway, New York, New York 10023. We're on the **fourth floor**.)

**Def or deaf?** Claiming that Aerosmith's *Toys in the Attic* is the **ultimate rap record**, core B-Boys Run-D.M.C. recently went into the studio to record a version of one of its songs, "Walk This Way," with Aerosmithers Steven Tyler and Joe Perry. Highlights of the session: producer **Rick Rubin** explaining to Joe what **crack** is; the Beastie Boys showing up and stealing Joe's guitar picks; Steven's parting remark: "Man, this was **def**."

San Antonio, Texas, is currently enjoying a major **heavy metal boom**. Its **spiritual godfather** is none other than Ozzy Osbourne, who on a recent visit showed his colors by **pissing on the Alamo**.

The line starts here: the **PMRC** has produced a press kit consisting entirely of pro-PMRC articles. Unfortunately, you can't have it until you **cough up \$10**. The contribution is **tax deductible**. Expect Ferdinand Marcos to order 5,000.

Brainteaser: if **Imelda Marcos** wears a new pair of panties every day except **Sunday**, a new brassiere every day but **Tuesday** and **Thursday**, and changes shoes on **Wednesday, Friday**, and **Saturday**, which will she run out of first? Clue: it will happen in **1989**.

Last year Britain earned \$1.5 billion from exporting its pop music. That's more than it earned from exports of **tobacco, sugar, clothing, and steel**. "I know nothing about pop music," said Conservative Party chairman Norman Tebbit while announcing the figures. Something he should be told: the majority of British musicians would like to **abolish the Conservatives**.

Regarding Stevie Wonder's **public service** announcement: "Before I'll ride with a drunk, I'll drive myself." Thanks, but we'll call a **cab**.

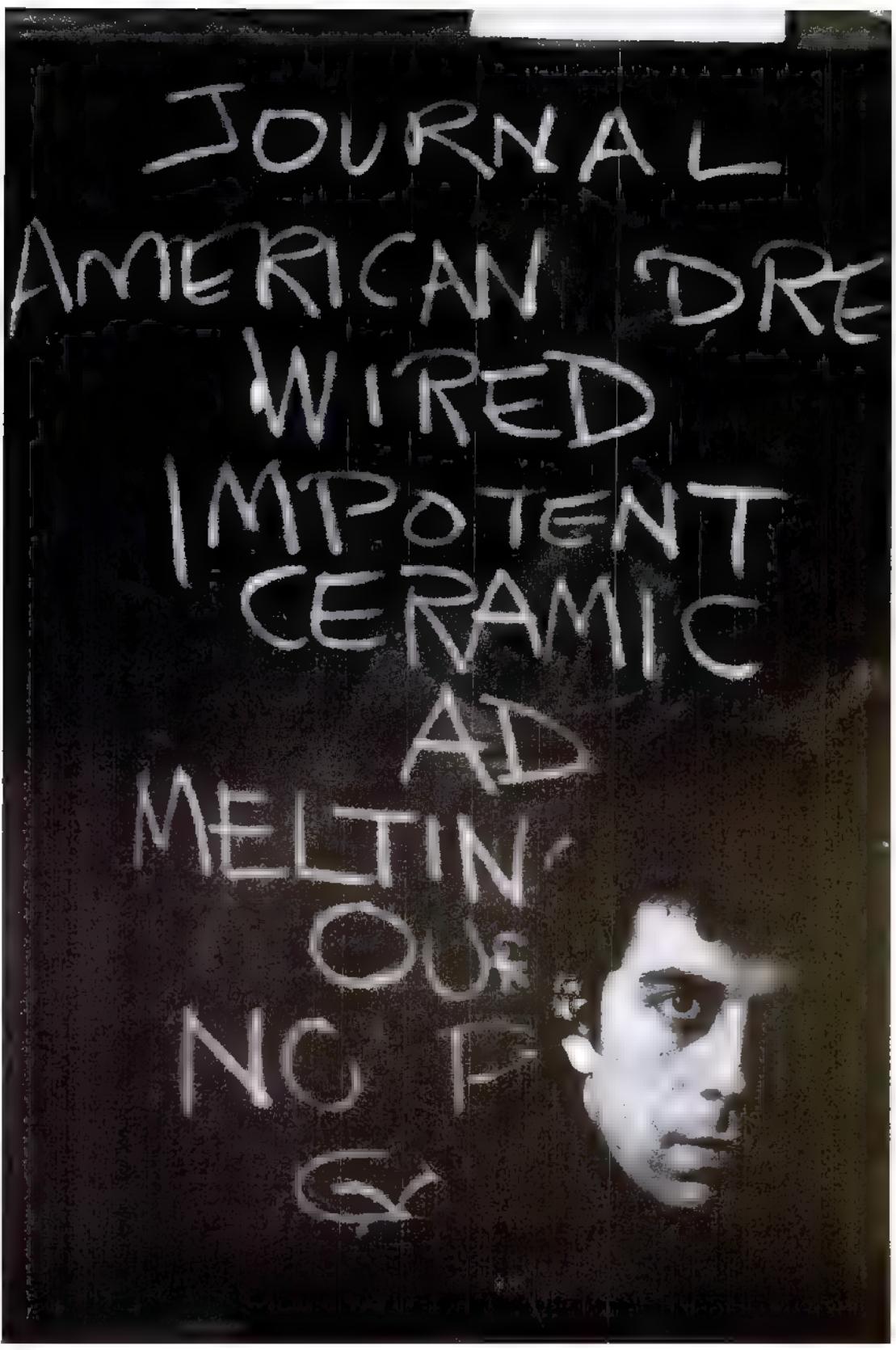
Raging Bullshit: Still smarting from last month's aspersions on their boy's boxing skills, **Sean Penn**'s corner was curt in neither confirming nor denying his next **photographer-opponent**. But the hoped-for confrontation between Penn and **king paparazzo** Ron Galella is building up with some good prefight rhetoric. "Listen, I've staked out Jackie O, McQueen, Jagger, and Brando," says Galella. "Compared to them, Madonna and Penn are two pipsqueaks in diapers. I wasn't even interested in shooting their wedding. Penn is nothing to look at. He's ugly. I don't blame him for not wanting his picture taken."

## Eric Bogosian's National Gallery

"I would like to be a guy who makes stuff of incredibly effervescent and pastel beauty," Eric Bogosian muses. "But unfortunately this is not my lot in the world." Instead, the 32-year-old New York actor, playwright, and solo performer works from a palette inspired by Zap Comix and Hieronymous Bosch. His savagely funny one-man shows illustrate the American dream gone bad or strange. Performing on a bare stage, with few props, he sketches dozens of weird and typical American men, all of them uniformly desperate, duped, spiritually and morally dead.

Throughout *Drinking in America*—Bogosian's latest and most accomplished show—he rapidly transforms himself from a Hollywood agent, wired on coke and steadied by booze, to a TV evangelist eager to teach junkies, homosexuals, and Jews "the discipline of the bullet," to Richie, an apprentice thug still wasted from the previous night's odyssey of drugs, drink, and mayhem. Richie proudly recalls how he and his friends stole a van from a hippie and later blew it to cinders: "It was beautiful, man...it was like spiritual or somethin'."

"I'm concerned with delusions of pride, of not being happy with where you are and wanting to displace yourself—using drugs, dreams, or whatever," Bogosian says. Nonetheless, as a moralist born of the '60s, he indicts complacency as much as twisted desire. The show's only "normal" character, a nice family man with a "semi-creative" job, sets forth details of his "wonderful" life, yet progressively sounds like a robot running down on its juice. "In all my routines, I lay the situation out on paper and then say, 'What's wrong with this picture?' Everything this man says sounds fine, but he's not connected to anything larger than his own little world. He lacks a spiritual center."



Though he normally gets ideas from observation and personal experience, many of Bogosian's funniest creations spring from the recesses of his fantasy life. For example, a crassly drunk salesman from the Southwest—the kind of man who in the same breath says he "cares about people" and demands that a hooker deliver his money's worth—might seem alien to Bogosian's self-conscious introspection. "I know it sounds horrible," he admits, "but in a way I do have a dream that places me in a hotel room, drunk, with a hooker attached to a part of my body. There's a part of me that says there couldn't be anything better. And yet my routine makes it seem so hollow."

In fact, many of Bogosian's best bits are nightmare extensions of his own darker impulses. Having struggled for years in New York bohemia, he doesn't deny that his recent, more mainstream recognition came with its own dark impulses. "For the first time in my life I've begun to earn genuine middle-class American money. And I immediately started wanting MORE. I wanted to be a movie star—to make a lot of money. I wanted everyone to kiss my ass." Grappling with self-indulgence, he finally realized that success means "getting the chance to do your work. It doesn't mean hanging out and saying to yourself, 'You're great,' all day long."

In any terms, Bogosian is on the verge of significant success. *Drinking In America* earned flat-out raves, a major label will soon release an album of his performance monologues, and a full-length play written by and starring Bogosian will premiere in New York this fall. But, to get to the point, is there any hope? "I don't know. I don't pretend to have solutions or even any new insights. If, in my shows, I've posed a decent question or two, then I've succeeded at that level. But mostly I'm just trying to make an entertaining show." His modesty is beguiling. But don't believe it.

—Judy Richheimer

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Eric Bogosian wonders what's wrong with this picture.



# blue in heaven

Could an Irish Invasion make the British one ancient history?

Article by Glenn O'Brien

I'm Irish but I'm from Cleveland. It's a great rock 'n' roll town. Now I live in New York. There's a lot of Irish people here. Everybody knows all the cops in New York are Irish. My wife is Irish. She's from New Orleans. A million Irish people died of cholera digging the canals down there in the 19th century. There are three million Irish left in Ireland, about a third of them in the Dublin phone book. There used to be five million Irish, but how are you going to keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen the Boston Celtics?

Being Irish is a trip.

When you say "The British Invasion" to Irish guys like me, we don't necessarily think about the Beatles, the Stones, and the Dave Clark Five. We might think instead about guys in steel hats with horns pulling into the bay, setting our thatched roofs on fire, raping the wives, buggering the children and recruiting us into their rowing club.

Not "I Want to Hold Your Hand" as much as "I Want to Own Your Land." It's just a thing about the British. Of course it was a long time ago that they banned our language and shot Uncle Paddy, but time crawls when you're not having fun.

But I keep thinking about how there's going to be this Irish Invasion that's going to make the British Invasion ancient history. I like Guinness, U2 and potatoes. My favorite band is the Pogues and the most rocking thing I've seen lately is a bunch of guys practicing in a Dublin gym colder than a meat locker—a band called Blue in Heaven.

I got off the plane in Dublin and picked up my bag and walked out onto the ancestral turf and nobody stamped my passport or even looked at me. My bags could have been loaded with machine guns or condoms (now legal to bring into Ireland if you're married . . . only preventing bastards remains a

crime) or heroin. . . .

Heroin, says the guy driving me into town, is the reason that all of these buildings around here are torn down. Just like back home in Alphabet City, they clean up the neighborhood by tearing it down. I wonder if here too the real estate speculators are waiting in the wings. Anyway this guy says that the cheapest and most plentiful junk in Europe is hereabouts, courtesy of the I.R.A., who, he says, made a deal with Khomeini a few years back. Most of the addicts, he says, are about 12 years old.

I read a story in a music paper about the Thompson Twins' car breaking down in a poor Dublin neighborhood and how they were surrounded by 10-year-old junkies trying to sell dope.

Later I would read in a Dublin paper the opinion that heroin was to the Irish race what firewater was to the American Indian.

Dublin smells like diesels and piss, and the buildings and the river are black. I've got Irish blood, but my clothes or my aura must look American, because dozens of tattered tots tell me that they haven't eaten since Wednesday and they have 14 brothers and sisters at home. Begging gets particularly heavy as I head back to the hotel on O'Connell Street, where Burger King, Wendy's, and McDonald's are located. Poor kids on junk and junk food.

I meet Shane O'Neill, singer, guitar player and theoretician, at the pub in the old Gresham Hotel where I'm staying. It was the best hotel in Dublin to survive the shelling of British warships in 1917. I had a real Irish Guinness—not the export stuff, but the stuff that pours like motor oil with a head on it. Shane has a tequila and orange juice. He picked that up in the Bahamas where they just recorded their second album with Chris Blackwell, Island Records prez, and E.T.



Andrew Collier

Thorngren, wiz producer (Talking Heads, Tom Tom Club, etc.).

Shane has platinum hair with black roots and carries a flask. In photos Shane and bass player Dec have a look out of the sci-fi film *Village of the Damned*, where aliens knock up a whole town's women with blond aliens. Dec is at that very moment being blondered at the hairdresser. Shane has heavy black roots.

Shane isn't like a leprechaun, but he might be a bit pixilated, like, say, Malcolm Mac. His father is in the traditional Irish music business; he owns the Mulligan label and puts out records by people like James Galway. Like father, like son, sort of—one preserving it and one making it new.

We hook up with guitarist Eamon, bassist Dec and drummer Dave a little later.

### The Story So Far

Shane: "We all live around the corner from each other in Dublin. We never knew each other in school. We met through playing. I've always played with Dave the drummer. Dec has always been around. Eamon has always been around. We did play in a band, but it was like the start of this band. It was called Amuse. I didn't sing. I played guitar and Dave played drums. We were just into playing. We never had jobs. We never considered anything. We didn't care. We just wanted to play. We used to support bands we thought were going to be really good. We would think we were going to get blown off the stage. These guys would show up with blue hair and we'd think, they are really going to be heavy. We'd do our set and then watch them and we couldn't believe it. We did a few like that and all our hopes got dashed. That's why we changed. Our new album doesn't sound anything like the first one."

G.O.B.: "I like the first album."

Shane: "I love it. It's part of what we did. It's like a prologue. But when we got out and played and saw all these bands, I thought, Some band is going to come along and blow the fucking ass out of all these bands. I didn't think it would be us. We were playing quiet music in a way. It's kind of Irish influence. It's atmospheric. There are elements of power. But there is a lot of ethereal stuff where we didn't even know what we were doing. We were just playing."

### Ireland vs. England vs. America: Who Will Win?

Shane: "Over here people get drunk and they dance to you. When we went to England everybody was just standing there. They turn their back on you, in fact. Now I'd smash things over their heads, but at the time we were just going: What the fuck, America's much better. It's like Europe. They don't give a crap what you wear. In America or Germany if you go out and play a really good set they just love you. We supported the Damned in Germany and they just play. They're a fucking great band."

"We really enjoyed Cleveland. After

we toured America we didn't care if we never went back to England—a bunch of people dressing up trying to look strange. The strangest people look normal really. But in Cleveland you could go up on stage wearing something designed to make them hate you and after you start playing music they'd be going: Well, it's not bad.

"Then you can develop. Playing to 300 bricks in a wall that's waiting for the Cult to come on makes it harder to develop. In England they're so precious about what they listen to and how you package everything. In order to keep the mystique alive in their brains they have to manufacture it."

### Jesus and Mary Chainsaw Massacre

Shane: "Jesus and Mary Chain is supposedly a really heavy band, really dangerous. We want to play with them in Nottingham. Nottingham City is the most appalling place, they think they're so cool. They all sit there with their hair in the air.

"They have riots. The bands have nothing to do with it. They just walk off stage and the audience riots. Nothing to do with the band. They want something to go crazy about. I want to cause something. Maybe a broad racial theme, like I'm Irish and you're English, just to get a real riot. I'd love to get on stage and smash the Jesus and Mary Chain. They're a waste of space."

G.O.B.: "If I were to guess what bands I thought influenced your first album I'd say maybe the first Pere Ubu."

Shane: "I never heard of them. I'd say . . . I can't listen to them anymore, but I did listen to Joy Division. New Order are great guys. They're the best. We did a tour with them and we were late once and they let us play after them. We did a tour with the Alarm afterwards and they were supposed to be socially conscious and they were bastards. New Order has a bad name in the press and they're decent."

### Some Theories

G.O.B. Theory: "English bands get pushed in the U.S. because they don't cost the American companies anything. The English have done all the research and development for free. Comparable American bands don't stand a chance."

Shane Theory: "Do you know why bands make it in England? They make it because there are herds of sheep walking around the London streets looking for something to follow and they'll follow anything. In the U.S. bands have to evolve. They have to get better. In England they let them get away with being bad so they haven't got a chance of living up to what they think they are. Everybody in England says 'Oh, wow, you're great man' to any nineteen-year-old turd from Glasgow who thinks he's it."

"Coming from here, we've had a shitty time from the press. When we got signed it was bad because we signed with a big label. We should have signed with an independent label. So we were a U2 clone, being from Ireland and being signed to the same label."

"When we got signed the people



Andrew Cahn

**"Nottingham City is the most appalling place, they think they're so cool. They all sit there with their hair in the air."**

from our major label were sitting in their squats waiting to see what color they should dye their hair, listening to people from independent labels smash concrete onstage. That was really big. Einstürzende Neubauten. It's not music. It's not entertaining. What is it? They are so preoccupied with leading. Did you ever see that Monty Python joke where the guy gets all these mice and he plays music by hitting them with a hammer? I'm waiting for a band to come out with that. Or washing machines onstage."

G.O.B. Theory: "But if you really make music with those washing machines the English press will hate you."

Shane Theory: "The Cult has hair down to their waists and huge bell-bottoms. Over here people make a joke of smelly hippies that are left over from the '60s, but when you meet them they're not really like that at all. They're OK. But the Cult are really smelly hippies. They're not hippies at all. They're trendies. We toured with them a while ago and they weren't like that at all. They were just coming out of this Gothic thing and were all talking about dragons and bats and things like that. The guitarist who used to think he was the Edge now thinks he's Jimi Hendrix's big brother."

"On our album we've got a song

called 'I Wanna Be Your Man.' The Beatles did it and the Stones did it. Everything is apathetic in England now. The music press say everything has been done before. The readers read it and think, Wow, everything has been done before. At gigs they think, Everything's been done before. Then the bands think, Everything's been done before. So of course they're going to start hittin' bits of concrete or acting like they're from outer space."

"I suddenly realized: So what if it's all been done before? I haven't even done it before! I never saw Jimi Hendrix on stage. I never saw the Who smash up their equipment. I don't give a fuck if some old bastard from the *NME* has seen it 600 times. I've never seen it before. I picked 'I Wanna Be Your Man' so I could say, Look, there's something that's been done before and I'm doing it again my way."

### Affluences

Shane: "There's so much more energy in bands like the Stooges and the Velvet Underground than what's coming out at the moment. If I can't put at least the

**Above:** On the rocks. Blue in Heaven pose for a picture, doing something that's been done before, their way.

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE BAND OF THE DECADE



# U2 IN THE NAME OF LOVE

A History From Ireland's Hot Press Magazine

Edited by Niall Stokes

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enthusiasm back into it, I'm going to get out. If it has all been done before, I get a great kick out of doing it again.

"We always did our own songs. Even when 20 of them went E-D. We did once do a cover version of 'Fever.' And one day we found out how many songs you can put in a medley with 'Vicious.'

"I'm trying to get new influences. The last time we went to America we got records by all kinds of people we'd never heard of, like Muddy Waters, Little Richard . . ."

Shane is 22, Dave is 20. Never heard of the New York Dolls.

Shane: "I've got a name in Dublin for putting down so much, but it's not that. It's just that I have such big expectations and no one is playing anything that's real anymore. I don't like U2, but at least they're playing real. You go to their gigs and it's real. You've got to respect them."

### Love

Shane: "I love Iggy Pop, I love the Velvet Underground. I love the Doors. L.A. Woman by the Doors—every song is so brilliant. And an Irish band called Them. I only heard Them about a year ago. I just thought Van Morrison was an old fat guy who did meandering music that went on for ages with no tune in it. Then I was watching this old Ready, Steady, Go and they said 'Here's Van Morrison and Them' and he came on and did 'Baby Please Don't Go.' I made them play the tape about 50 times, it was so good.

"When I was a kid I got a Lou Reed album, Transformer, by mistake and I didn't understand it but I liked the tunes.

"Gary Glitter. You can look at him and laugh but the guy is a performer. That's the difference between him and bands today."

### Fen Shui Music

Blue in Heaven's office is a place called the SFX Center.

The last time ZZ Top played Dublin they played the SFX Center. SFX stands for St. Francis Xavier, the man responsible for thousands of Irishmen's initials all over the world. This is the big rock venue in Dublin. ZZ Top must have wanted to play this town bad, being Irish. It's the size of an average American high school gym, although the stage seems to take up half of the place.

There is no heat in the SFX Center. When Blue in Heaven practices there they have to rock out to stay warm. Blue in Heaven's manager's office is where the projectionist's booth would be if this were a movie theater. It's the perfect view out of a rock manager's window: a big stage with your band on it.

This band likes to play. They play every day.

They play loud and hard and they jam. It's never the same twice.

Dublin is cold. I feel like sleeping with my overcoat on at night. It's freezing inside SFX but the music keeps you warm. I realized that rock 'n' roll is a form of heat. It can keep you warm and it can burn things down.



**Shane: "Who knows I'm not doing Irish music now? You can think about what the English came over and wiped out, but that's a loser's game. So what? Let's write new music. Let's write a new language."**

It's cold but I feel some kind of strange energy here, like a cool magnetic breeze. Like a beat. I feel like the juice is coming from here. There's a blight that you can see when you walk around, but there's a blessing here too. There's a vibe so thick you can get it on tape. If there is a microwave cooking of the soul it's this geological rock 'n' roll.

This could be a great rock 'n' roll band. They're still learning but they already know. You can hear that they just found the Stooges and they're trying things on. You can hear them making it up as they go along and you can hear it working like it always did and that's rock 'n' roll.

But you also hear the pure forms of perfected rock 'n' roll power given a new tone. Every tune is experimental but every one is finished. The mistakes sound good. They make you think.

Shane and Eamonn not only have great guitar tone, chop instinct, and intensity but they also understand how to play like a team. Dec plays planetary pulses with hard edge and Dave is just a great athlete drummer. Sounds like he's got two basses and four feet, but it's only one and two.

I listen to their first album and the songs are really good. They learned how to play better, so they sort of

rewrote some of the songs... I listen to the second album and it's even better. These guys like learning and getting better so they don't play their old stuff in concert. This is not how you're supposed to develop fans, but it seems like a scientific approach.

Blue in Heaven's sound is almost like the old wall of sound but it's more of a dome of sound, dynamics within a drone. Like U2, like Jesus and Mary Chain, like the Byrds, like the Stooges, just like Sister Ray said.

After practice, Blue in Heaven goes to a pub. James Joyce used to drink at this one and Leopold Bloom's front door is on display there. Samuel Beckett used to drink at the pub across the street.

Shane tells Dec that his hair looks ridiculous. Dec has no black roots in his head of ultra-blond. I guess Shane thinks that his black roots make his do look casual, whereas Dec's shows too much tending. Dec doesn't care; you can tell by his shoes: brown lizard winklepickers with gold tips on the points.

After the pub Blue in Heaven goes to the Pink Elephant. The club is a disco restaurant that seems to be the Dublin bohemian vortex. The food is good and the music is hiphop. Shane keeps complaining about how he hates this kind of music, but practically every song he says, Well, this is a good one. Various bands and managers sit in their banquettes ignoring each other. The band Blue in Heaven is most into ignoring at the moment is Cactus World News, which has been signed to U2's label. Shane can't remember if he slagged them in a recent interview that's due to hit print any minute. Dublin seems like a hotbed of bitchiness, but there's a more intensely competitive thing going on here.

Standing at a Pink Elephant urinal I heard somebody say about me: "Look at him. No hands." Style is where you find it.

After the Pink Elephant we visited a wine bar, which stays open long after other bars close. Blue in Heaven wound up sitting at a table cordially trading insults with their Cactus World News arch rivals. I seem to recall Eamon, the quiet one, threatening bodily harm to someone, although with a certain ambiguity, shortly before we called it an evening. I do remember well Dec falling flat on his face on the sidewalk after we left the wine bar. I didn't think he was drunk. I thought it was probably that the metal points on his shoes got stuck on something. Dec drove me back to the hotel and as we pulled up in front I said to Dec that he drove a lot better than he walked, a compliment that inspired him so that he decided to drop me at the door, literally. A few hours later Dec was a free man once again and maybe wiser. Watching him play bass, I'd say he's a quick study.

#### Rock 'n' Roll

Shane: "I met this guy from Trinidad and I thought it was interesting, because his country as well had been colonized by the English. And there is quite a resentment by people like my mother,

who resents that the Irish language is gone. The English did horrific things to quell the Irish tradition. So I asked this guy if he felt bad that they came and took his music. He said, "We are a hard people. We are a hard band. If they want to come down and take that, next year I come back with something better."

G.O.B.: "What's it like to play in the north of Ireland?"

Shane: "They're great people. We don't know if they're Catholic or Protestant or what. I haven't got a clue. All I know is that Northern Irish audiences are among the best in the world. Glasgow too. Celtic audiences are great. America is full of Celts. Timothy Leary has a theory about Celts crossing the globe, moving west. Just because people weren't born in Ireland, they're still Irish. Leary thinks that L.A. is where it's at now for the Irish and when you're flying east you're traveling back through the centuries. He says, Don't go back to Dublin because it's like going back through time to the eighteenth century. In a way it's very true. But in Northern Ireland they're cheering you when you come on stage and they've never seen you before. It's like, Let's see what you can do.

"Being to America and to Nassau changed my mind on the whole Irish situation. Before I never had a view. Now I think the I.R.A. are wrong. I've gotten more humanitarian or something. The main thing is that people have got to get on up there.

"This guy Vince who worked with us got drunk and he said: You know Shane, I'm never ever going to have a gun. I thought it was hilarious and he took offense. He kept saying, No, seriously. I'm never gonna have a gun.

**"Did you ever see that Monty Python joke where the guy gets all these mice and he plays music by hitting them with a hammer? I'm waiting for a band to come out with that. Or washing machines onstage."**

Ever. I'm not even going to have one in my house. I'm never going to shoot nobody. I was roaring laughing. I couldn't make the guy understand why. He thought I was attacking America. I love America. But his American morality was, I'm never going to carry a gun. Whereas . . ."

Dave: "We've never seen a gun."

Shane: "The only dead person I've ever seen was my granny and she was washed and on a marble slab. Over here you're a freak if you don't go to mass on Sunday. Maybe Timothy Leary's right.

"This sounds politically naive, and it is, but basically what the I.R.A. wants to do is free the North. The fact is that if they got what they wanted, so what? They'd still have to basically get down and live with the problem, two groups of people living together. I keep going back to what that guy from Trinidad said. You have to be clever. You have to be hard.

"It's what you do at the time that counts. Who knows I'm not doing Irish

music now? You can think about what the English came over and wiped out, but that's a loser's game. So what? Let's write new music. Let's write a new language. We can write a new language if we want. Anything is possible."

#### Heaven

Shane: "The band rejected a lot of names before picking Blue in Heaven. The words blue and heaven were in a lot of the rejected names. One member of the band suggested the name Pussy Yoga. He's no longer with the group. Eamon's idea of heaven is swimming in the Bahamas. Shane's idea of heaven is swimming in the Bahamas. Shane's ideal of hell is the Pink Elephant on Saturday night. 'Modra' is Shane's favorite Irish word. It means dog, as in "Now I wanna be your modra."

*Below: Blue in Heaven's parting shot: (L-R) Shane, Dave, Dec, and Eamon. Not pictured: Iggy Pop.*



Dennis Morris

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# EXILES ON MAINSTREAM

Being a Rolling Stone used to mean never having to pick up a Grammy. Until now.

Article by  
Glenn O'Brien

**M**y grandfather couldn't watch too much of the Watergate hearings because he would get too excited and angry. That's the way I am about the Grammy Awards. This year I thought I could watch if I didn't listen to the sound, especially if I played something to balance it out, like the Butthole Surfers or Phranc or something. This technique didn't work. I still wound up yelling "Nuke the Grammys!" but it was worth watching for a while, if only because 1) I saw that someday Kenny Rogers would run for president and 2) I got to see the Rolling Stones pick up their Lifetime Achievement Award.

This was a special Grammy, like the special



Oscars they give out to big movie stars who are dying of cancer. In some ways this presentation seemed premature. Most of the Stones are still under 50 years of age. But I guess in the fast lane you can live a whole life in half the time it usually requires. In fact, Rolling Stone Brian Jones completed an entire lifetime, as did pianist Ian Stewart, who was never an official member of the band because he was considered too ugly.

So there they were, on a hookup from London, accepting their statuettes from Eric Clapton, goofing around and acting just as deliberately stupid as they had 20 years earlier, only stupider (and maybe less deliberate). Keith looked like a bum, even worse than he looked on Live Aid. Bill looked blank. Charlie looked grim. Woody looked inexplicable. Mick looked great. The reason they were acting cocky, bitchy, and snotty was not because it's their style. It was their style 20 years ago. Tonight they were rebellious with a cause: business! 'Cause they probably didn't want to take this stupid Grammy, even though (or because) they never won a regular one, and because they probably felt they had some slack left on their lifelines. So the Stones didn't even attend the ceremony—they were coming in punky but ghastly over the satellite from London, where they don't live.

Oh, God, shut that thing off!

Nuke the Grammys! Free Keith (Hernandez, N.Y. Mets)!

Save the whales! Babylon is falling!

I like the Rolling Stones. They were my heroes. They were great artists. They changed everything. They even changed jobs—unfortunately, now, in the autumn of their years, they sometimes appear to have become a Rolling Stones tribute band, doing covers of their favorite bands, themselves, and shooting water rats and feeding them to their geese. But, as Mick once sang, "It's alright."

A lifetime of achievement? Oh, God! Much, much more than that, you Grammynivorous fools. They were gods, almost, sort of.

#### THE FIRST TIME

I ever heard the Rolling Stones I was deejaying at a

CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) dance. I was 16 years old. It was 1964. A friend of mine came in with the first Rolling Stones album. I put it on and it never came off. My life changed.

The first song on the first Stones album is "Route 66." You might say that the first thing on the Stones' minds was motorizing west. This was a song we'd heard before, but this was very cool music, very tight, driving, and very, very black and white.

When I listen to "I Just Wanna Make Love to You" now, I can still feel how radical it felt then. Suburban white kids had never heard of Willie Dixon or the blues. It was so abstract, so dense and intense. It was like gospel music, but this was a whole new gospel tuned to TV-baby wavelength and skirt length and hair length. This was the wavygray of the future that Mad Daddy had prophesied.

I was totally impressed with the sexual rhythm and blues rhetoric of this band. Jimmy Reed's "Honest I Do" is totally languid bump and grind. "King Bee" was the most startlingly sexual song I'd ever heard. Today I know that the Stones did Slim Harpo's song almost note for note, down to that wild swooping bass line, but that doesn't diminish its brilliance.

We'd had a taste of Bo Diddley, but nothing like "Mona," a totally fabulous rutting fuzz guitar and underwater mix. This was the most throb there ever was. It was future-shock rock 'n' roll.

This CYO dance was in Cleveland, the "birthplace of rock 'n' roll." Cleveland was where guys like Alan Freed and Mad Daddy played heavy R&B and honking sax and down-and-dirty music on the radio and where the term got itself together. The white kids were into the Impressions and Major Lance, but they'd never thought of doing it themselves. And they'd never heard of Willie Dixon.

The Stones came to Cleveland in a few weeks. A girl fell out of the balcony at the show. The place was half full, but berserk over this alien but innate sound. When the Stones talked to the TV news, nobody could understand a word they said. They were regarded as something completely incomprehensible, and to a kid my age that was the coolest.



Michael Putland/Retna Ltd.

In the autumn of their years, they sometimes appear to have become a Rolling Stones tribute band, doing covers of their favorite band, themselves.

Mick moved like James Brown. He vibrated across the stage without moving his feet. The band had postures that seemed to be promising future moves.

The Rolling Stones took the great American music to the great American kids who had never heard it.

But the Stones weren't just a really hip cover band, even then, because they had their own sound (and Phil Spector's) and it was half Afro-American and half Anglo-Medieval Gothic Country-Western, as you might notice on the first Jagger-Richard composition on an album, "Tell Me (You're Coming Back.)"

They could copy Don Covay, Slim Harpo, and Bo Diddley and have it down but still add something cool naturally.

They also looked really cool, and as soon as I saw that album cover I knew that someday I would have hair that long.

#### FASHION

The Rolling Stones were the first real fashion band. The Beatles were Carnaby Street, the Stones were psycho-couture. David Bailey took their pictures. They dated Shrimptons and Verushkas and Nicos, and even the average model dated by a Rolling Stone booked at a much higher hourly rate than the average model dated by a Beatle.

They did a song called "Walking the Dog" by Rufus Thomas that is about, among other things, wearing black and walking.

The way Mick sings the words "seersucker suit" in "Under Assistant West Coast Promo Man" (Out of Our Heads LP) is devastating in the fashion sense of the word.

In 1967 the Rolling Stones returned to the Ed Sullivan Show to do their new songs "Ruby Tuesday" and "Let's Spend the Night Together." Ed vetoed the latter tune unless Mick altered the words. Mick agreed and camped it to the hilt as they did "Let's Spend Some Time Together." No longer were they brooding, dark-suited Edwardians—here were some postnuclear medieval polysexual minstrels. Brian Jones wore a pillbox hat on his enormous blond bouffant that changed America. I had a friend whose father kicked

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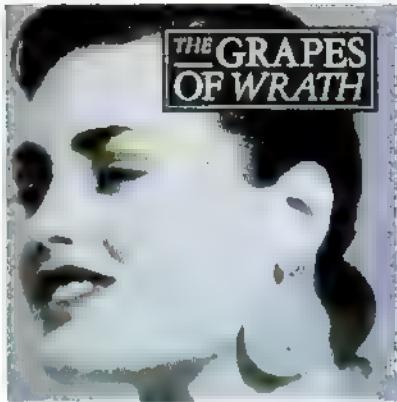
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## IMPORTS

### Do the Exotofunk

Voilà. Le second imports column brought to you by SPIN and HEINEKEN IMPORTED BEER.

The Talking Heads sure taught a lot of European musicians how to do the exotofunk (a little shuffle that combines ersatz third-worldisms with an all-American urban dance beat). Belgian artiste **Luc Van Acker** certainly owes them a nod, as you'll readily hear on his eponymous new Wax Trax LP. Present and former members of Pigbag, Shriekback, Blanckmange, and Tuxedomoon, and singer Anna Domino lend hands on this



throbbing, danceable, and ever-so-moody travogue.

September Bowl of Green by Canada's **Grapes of Wrath** is just one of several intriguing new pop 'n' roll releases on the Netwerk label. Chipper vocals and chiming guitars celebrate daily life in the great white north, and a cover of "If I Needed Someone" is more soothing than a Vancouver, B.C., hot tub.

**BRIEF VACATIONS:** The **Robotics' Man and Machine** (Ariwa) is a dub feast concocted by the Mad Professor, a British Jamaican who has stirred up many a mesmerizing sonic stew using a well-balanced menu of meat-and-potatoes riddims . . . Frenchmen **Kahondo Style** are all over the globe on *My Heart's in Motion*. Pop sung in Japanese, Arabic, and (I think) Bulgarian is combined with good old American free jazz on this Nato release . . . Finally, card-carrying-communist **Robert Wyatt** (of Soft Machine fame) tells it like it is in the plaintively thought-provoking songs on *Old Rottenhot* (Rough Trade). Get it.

—Bob Comeray

in the television set and then burned all of the kids' records after this performance. Beyond the future valley of rock video, Brian Jones's fashion look flipped hormonal synaptic switches into an AC/DC mode throughout North America. Almost enough for the Lifetime Achievement Award already.

On the single sleeve of "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby?" they showed that they could get up in as good a drag as anybody, if not better.

If Britain had a king, Mick might have developed a little differently, but he knew the seat of power in Britain and he knew how to work that skirt.

Street politics became as hard-rock as they did for a time thanks to the Stones. Maybe they ended the war. Ask Nixon.

#### WEIRDOS

The album *Aftermath* was the beginning of the Stones' existential burlesque phase, in which they not only realized that they knew what they were doing, but they done did it. It was a strange name for an album, suggesting both a hangover and a nuclear war. It kicked off with "Mother's Little Helper," a song about Mom being a pillhead, with the chorus "What a drag it is getting old." Then came the feminists' favorites, "Stupid Girl" and "Under My Thumb," and other warm and tender songs like "Doncha Bother Me," "Going Home," "High and Dry," "Out of Time," "It's Not Easy," "Take It or Leave It," and "What to Do." Hey, they had become an authentic blues band. This was total negative appeal. Positive rejection. It's almost a concept album.

*Between the Buttons*, 1967, we see the boys standing out in a blurry blue field. It looks like it's cold. Mick might be shivering in his semi-artichoke hairdo and fur coat. Brian is definitely not cold, but he seems to be having trouble holding his eyes open. Charlie looks like he knows too much. Keith has on very Jackie Kennedy shades. "Connection" has an obsessive harem dance a-go-go bump-and-run backbeat and words that indicate that our lads are into the Songs of Experience: "Everything is going in the wrong direction/The doctor wants to give me more injections/

**Mick moved like James Brown.  
He vibrated across the  
stage without moving his feet.  
The band had postures that  
seemed to be promising moves  
for future reference.**

Give him a shot for a thousand bad infections and I don't know if they'll let me go/Connection, I just can't make no connection/But all I want to do is get back to you."

It was the beginning of a long romance.

It was also the beginning of hard-rock camp — the Stones created a vision somewhere between Oscar Wilde and the Mudmen of New Guinea. They merged African rhythms with vaudeville and created a cannibalized camp, charged with mysteries and fueled with publicity.

#### DEBBIL BUSINESS

"There ain't no devil. That's just God when he's drunk."

— Tom Waits

There's a lot of money to be made impersonating Elvis, but there are fortunes to be made impersonating gods and devils. Playing God is virtually impossible — but playing his mouthpiece, butler, or accountant is equally rewarding and not terribly difficult. Playing the devil can be a great role.

For a guy who's supposed to embody ultimate evil,



Lawrence Klast/Sparrow Photos

the devil is a pretty decent guy. His sense of humor may be a little extreme, but usually the devil is OK. He just doesn't like goody-goodies. At least that's how Hollywood has depicted him — even the poet Milton wound up writing nice things about him. And in the Book of Job he comes off as a bit of a prankster who does a little strong-arm work for God.

The Stones thing seems to have started out as a joke on the grandiosities of the semi-divine Beatles and their happy world of yellow submarines, maharishis, and flower power.

The Beatles did "All You Need Is Love," and the Stones did "We Love You," which starts out with dragging chains and the slam of a jail door.

The Beatles and Rolling Stones formed a McLuhan/Manichaean or pop-Zoroastrian dual godhead for the Global Village hippies of the '60s and early '70s. The Stones represented the dark side of the flower force. When the Beatles issued their "change your mind instead" Revolution song, the Stones countered with "Street Fighting Man," which was literally as non-violent as the Beatles song, but due to Mick's matchless ambiguity and slurring and Keith's violent chops, "palace revolution" got lost in the mix, and the meaning was clearly hard. At the critical moment when the mushrooming hippie movement was forced to choose roles, organic-sprout cultivation vs. Molotov cocktails, the Stones were there, just as they had been "when Jesus Christ had his moment of doubt and pain."

The Stones were the first pop group to cash in on William Blake's vision of the Devil as ego. The Stones' devil was "a man of wealth and taste."

The Stones were perceived as the radicals, the Beatles were the liberals. While the Beatles were making a cartoon, the Stones were making *Sympathy for the Devil* with French director Jean-Luc Godard, co-starring the Black Panthers.

Mick wore his first dress in public at Brian Jones's funeral concert.

When the Rolling Stones gave their own free peace-and-love concert at a racetrack in California, something happened that had hippie journalists talking about the moon and Scorpio. The Hell's Angels, bodyguards of the Stones, killed a young black man who had a gun and who may or may not have been after Mick. Some hippies felt that this was a human sacrifice performed by the demonic forces that Mick and the lads and the Angels were working for. So the

continued on p. 70



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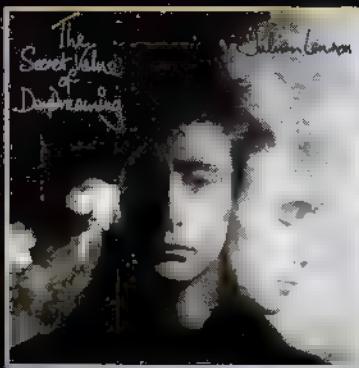
**"Come to think of it,  
I'll have a Heineken."**



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# SPINS

Edited by Rudy Langlais  
and Richard Gehr

Atlantic Rhythm & Blues  
1947–1974, Elvis Costello,  
Tommy Keene, Prince, the  
Zarkons, Stan Ridgway,  
Violent Femmes, Rolling  
Stones, Joe Zawinul



## Platter du Jour

**Various Artists**  
*Atlantic Rhythm and Blues  
1947–1974, Vols. 1–7*  
Atlantic

Watch me now. *Hunh!* Good God. Whoa! I'm groovin', babe. Yeah. Git down! Got to, got to, nownownow. Whoa! Mm-hm. Raht on!

'Scuse me while I straighten myself up a bit. Lord have mercy. It's just that I've been percolating to the felicitous grooves contained on Mr. Ahmet Ertegun's deluxe bonanza of soulful sound, *Atlantic Rhythm and Blues 1947–1974*. Hand me that wet towel, Jackson. Cool.

OK, let's save the history for Charlie Gillett (after all, he had more than 400 pages to run down the archives of the Atlantic label in his fine-fine-superfine tome, *Making Tracks*). What you be getting here is seven two-record sets, packaged good to go for the more affluent collector in an incredibly ugly red and black box

containing 186 (that's right) certified R&B killers cut by Atlantic during the '47-'74 glory days. And if this stuff doesn't get your ankles popping, call the mortician for a fitting to-day, Slim.

With the exception of the seventh (disco-era) volume, which contains a paltry 18 cuts, each of these monsters checks in with 28 ba-ad tracks; the big picture surveys everything from growlin' gutbucket tenor workouts in the "Hucklebuck" mode to lubed dance-floor gliders custom-tooled for John Travolta's real-life Saturday night antecedents. And dig it, you don't have to wait for K-Tel or whoever to sling this hash on late-night TV — it's available in your record store right this minute!

I say pick up the whole package, ace, but if your long green is on the short side, may I lay down the recommendations? For archaeologists, volume one is even money, with raw post-bop instrumentals by Tiny Grimes, Joe Morris, and Harry Van Walls, and primordial swingers by Stick McGhee, Big Joe Turner, Ruth Brown, and the sensational, long-forgotten doo-woppers, the Cardinals. The '52-'62 decade of Brill Building genius slides by in volumes two, three, and four, which home in on classic jive bombers by the Drifters, the Coasters, Ray Charles, the Clovers, and Chuck Willis, with writing and production courtesy of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Jerry Wexler, and Mahatma Ertegun himself. Suavitude galore is served on vol-

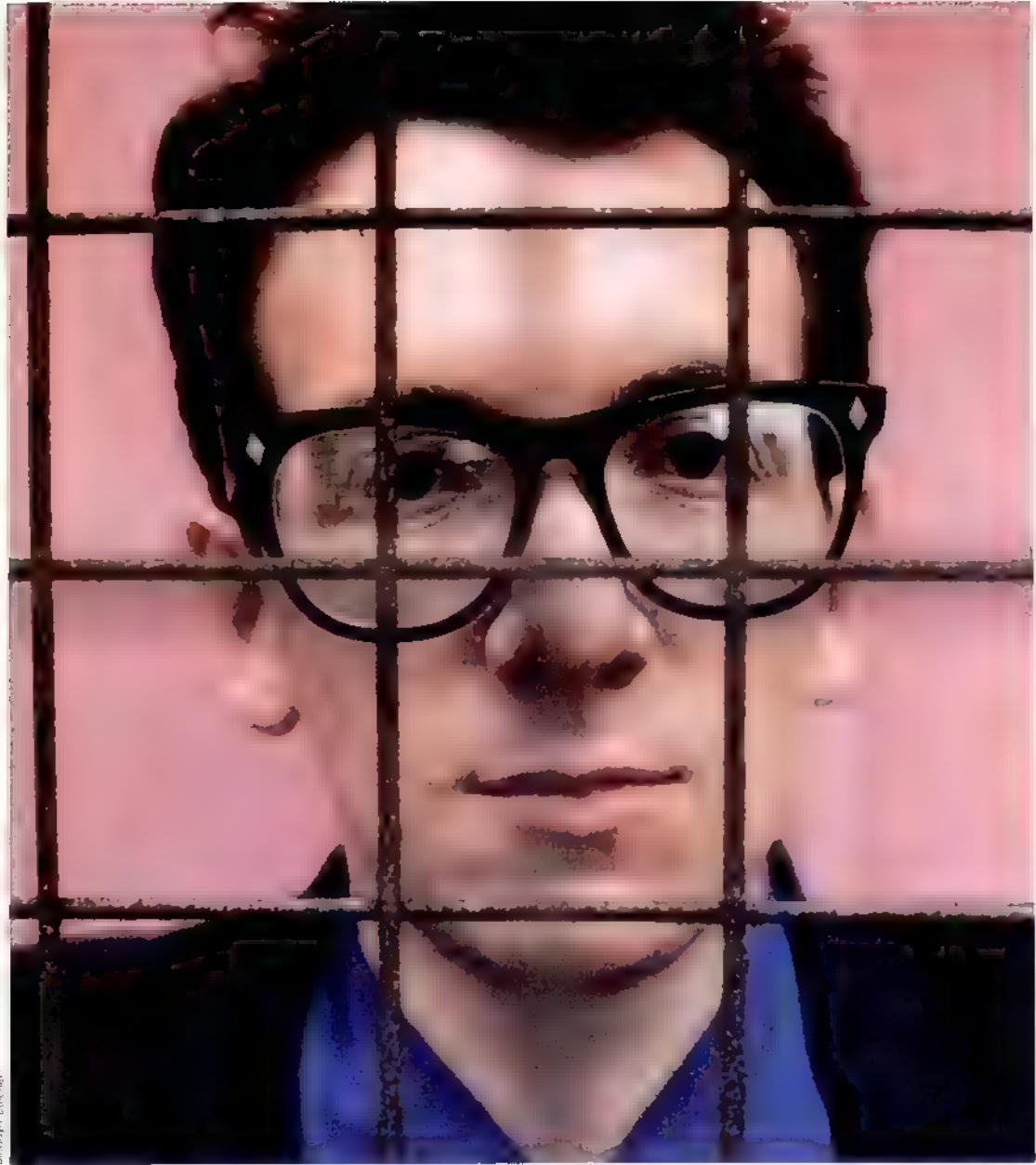
umes five and six, with plenty n' Memphis-carved grits by Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Lady Aretha, Sam and Dave, Percy Sledge, and Joe Tex. Sadly, things peter out in a big way with a truckload of Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway on volume seven, proving that great art is a thang of its era, dude.

But I ain't here to bitch — I'm here to make your booty twitch, and, friends, even if your archives contain the long-deleted *History of Rhythm and Blues* that this set supersedes, you should still tear ass down to the local discoteca with loot in hand. Herein lies the sweetly syncopated flux of R&B's all-time greatest label, chopped and channeled to make you sweat and fret, pump and hump, and (dare I say it) get down in the dirt with Gert. Save the liner-note reading for later, Spater, whip a slab on, and do it to death. Important point to remember: there are two versions of "Land of 1000 Dances" on this mutha. Hint-hint.

Reet, now I do believe that "Sweet Soul Music" is on side 11. Yeah, Wow! Sock it to me now. Heh-heh . . .

— Chris Morris

If you can't tune into the jive bombers lurking on these 14 fab sides, you might as well just hit the road, Jack. Above: Ray Charles (featured on volumes two, three, and four.)



Brendan Butcher

### The Costello Show (Featuring Elvis Costello) King of America Columbia

Call this one *Elvis Is Back*, same name as the great post-Army Presley disc. Except that this one proclaims itself a "Costello Show" production on the liner, emceed by one Declan Patrick Aloysius McManus, once again his legal tag. After two records of just plain diddling around, Elvis Cougar-Mellencamp sloughs off about 12 layers of stale wedding cake.

Thank McManus's Ed McMahon here, T-Bone Burnett. He probably knows more about baseball than any other born-again Christian ever to go on the road with Bob Dylan, and he also knows how to tell Elvis gently when he's filigreeing the inside of a thimble rather than adding a meaningful detail. Costello's new drink-

ing buddy and co-producer influenced E's decision to put the Attractions mainly on hold; enlisted on various things here are the King of America's TCB Band (Elvis Presley backups Jerry Scheff, Ron Tutt, and James Burton), jazz guy Ray Brown, Hall and Oates sidemen even, and—Jesus—Jim Keltner. Yet all of their playing is tightly smushed together into a fistful of American vernacular sounds, always at the service of Costello's voice.

That's voice, not lyrics, meaning Elvis doesn't outsmart himself nary a once on King, so far as I can tell; there's nothing about "the fag ends of the aristocracy" to discommode you on these 15 tunes. And if thanks go out to T-Bone, say a silent almsgiving as well to Mr. Mel Tormé. Once Costello tried on Gram Parsons's cowboy hat, and later he assumed Tormé's mentholated method to as little result. But damned if on such numbers as

"Our Little Angel" and "The Big Light" he doesn't sound like the Velvet Fog in Sun Studios, and damned if he doesn't sound great. The songs are more pointed, the words never outracing the meaning the way they have on the last two albums. "Brilliant Mistake" and "American Without Tears" show how learning about America from the movies can fuck you up; "Suit of Lights" considers death, a life of hard labor, and Merle Haggard. Yet the themes are ultimately secondary, bowing to the flutterings of his uvula. On record of unfalteringly good lyric writing ("Indoor Fireworks"!), the out-there shouts on the cover of J.B. Lenoir's "Eisenhower Blues" are as gratifying. He's always had a mouth almighty. Percy Dovetonsils here hacks them up like never before.

—RJ Smith



**Tommy Keene**  
*Songs From the Film*  
Geffen

In a perfect world, this would be a perfect record: Keene's a pretty snappy pop songwriter with a none-too-shabby band behind him. His intentions are honorable: to record an LP, release a few hit singles, and break into the big time. But for all its loyal, brave, and thrifty virtues, *Songs From the Film* registers a big, fat "uh, yes, well . . ." No matter how much you may want to like it, you'll have trouble remembering any of these tunes.

Keene wowed fans of jangly pop with two EPs on the Dolphin label, the last of which was produced by T-Bone Burnett and Don Dixon, who were set to handle Keene's first album. Here's the album and it's produced not by Burnett and Dixon but by slick Geoff Emerick. Keene's new, major-league label, Geffen, rejected the Burnett-Dixon product on grounds of insufficient commerciality; Emerick met the challenge of turning this popster of modest but real merit into a star by deflavorizing his tunes with a big production job. The low-key charms of his songs are lost in a sea of ringing guitars, and one more record with a zillion shimmering arpeggios is not high on my list of things the world is in desperate need of.

"Places That Are Gone," a joy in the original EP version, is clearly slated for hit singularity and is arranged and produced accordingly. The production quirks of the original (the tune faded in over a snippet of dialogue from *101 Dalmatians* and a sportscaster describing Bobby Thomson's epochal homer: "The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!") are replaced by guitars, guitars, and more guitars. The drums and Keene's reedy voice are mixed way up and the result is . . . uh, FM jocks will find it easy to segue into a Tom Petty song.

Tommy Keene's heart is in the right place; a few songs here sound like they might have borne fruit in more favorable settings, and Keene acknowledges the right kind of bad influences with a cover of Lou Reed's "Kill Your Sons," but his tales of romantic confusion and suburban angst are diffused by his nice manners and good breeding. He wants to say "Wally, let's ditch your crummy kid brother and . . ." but all that comes out is "Hello, Mrs. Cleaver, I was just telling Wallace . . ."

—Peter Carbonara

Above left: the former Elvis Costello



## Prince and the Revolution

*Parade—Music From Under the Cherry Moon*  
Paisley Park/Warner Brothers

From the voluptuous cascade of percussion, braying brass, and falsetto vocal flights that is the overture-like "Christopher Tracey's Parade" to the breathy, saturnine code of "Sometimes It Snows in April," *Parade*, the soundtrack for Prince's forthcoming *Under the Cherry Moon*, is proof positive that Prince is the single most sagacious figure in all of modern R&B, funk, and soul, the worthy successor to the mantle tailored by James Brown, Chuck Berry, Sly Stone, and Stevie Wonder. Not since Brown has there been an artistic vision possessed of such a quirky, riveting mystique, the manchild turning out tracks one has to LEARN in order to fully hear.

To Prince's credit, he's stuck by his dream of a world redeemed by the theopathic power of the libidinous spirit, even as the puritan forces of the PMRC gather at the gates. On "New Position," with its Caribbean soul of chiming steel pan and climbing base giving the blissful female backing vocals a pristine sheen, Prince sows his wild new oats in perfect funk abandon. With an audible fingersnap and the purposeful tread of tom-toms, the sensualisms intensify as the record slips (*Parade* has the best segues since *Abbey Road*) into "I Wonder U," a dark and broody reverie paced by a tensile flute and some heaving rhythm guitar.

As with the best of Prince, there is a sense of tingly exploration and innocence on the brink of overwhelming surprise in "Under the Cherry Moon," a singsong lullaby that could have been cowritten with Van Dyke Parks for an erotic Disney feature. "Girls & Boys," with its "Take Me With U"-styled tempo, explodes into deep-diving sax accents. A remarkable evocation of the nervous sweetness of pubescent enticement, "Girls & Boys" is one of the best dance tracks of the last 10 years and boasts a couplet that's at the very core of the rock ethos: "Happiness in its uncut form/Is the feeling that I get in your warm warm."

"Life Can Be So Nice" is another delirious jump-up ditty, but with an ominous undercurrent. When it abruptly shifts to the ethereal strings and keyboards of the "Venus de Milo" instrumental, bringing side one to a portentous close, the effect is that of a romantic cliff-hanger.

"Mountains" is a lush, modulated funk turn worthy of Smokey Robinson, but its lulling mood masks nightmarish images of the coming reckoning in South Africa

and the cultural decay that spawned international terrorism in the skies. As he does throughout *Parade*, Prince makes deft use of a newly controlled falsetto which parries with superbly peppy R&B horns. The early '70s juncture when the pop invention of the Beatles was eclipsed by the techno-mystical soul stirrings of the mature Stevie Wonder permeates both "Mountains" and "Do U Lie?" which even weaves some McCartney-esque English music-hall ambiance around its taunting croon.

The baroque richness of the preceding peaks fall away with an intentionally startling thud when "Kiss" kicks in, however, and we're in a hyper-spare sphere of mating first surveyed by James Brown circa 1967's "I Can't Stand Myself (When You Touch Me)," but even Mr. Dynamite never imagined a slow grind with this degree of percussive bite. After teaching the Godfather a new trick, Prince does the same for Stevie with "ANOTHER LOVERHOLENYOHEAD," a vibrant aural pastiche that knocks the high points of *Fulfillingness' First Finale* into a cocked

hat. With its exquisite melody, wonderfully tugging vocal, and brilliant clipped synthesized dissonances that heighten the overall wonder of the track, "Anotherlover" is classic popcraft that will likely rank with anything to emerge in the '80s.

In its self-absorbed sureness, its ingenious and humble homage to its forebears, and its stunning resolution of an uncommon agenda, *Parade* both ratifies and stands apart from all that Prince has attempted since he debuted in 1978 with *For You*. As a movie soundtrack, it sounds like the male equivalent of *Smooth Talk*; as a musical rite of passage, it's as if the Rogers boy regained his rock 'n' roll virginity and then rationed his load like a first-rate roué's one endlessly resourceful night. Prince is no longer making records for a potential audience or even for himself, he's making them to express one genuinely inquisitive person's possibilities—and that's the beginning of truly torrid inspiration.

—Timothy White



Mark Lendola

ad



## The Zarkons

*Riders in the Long Black Parade*  
Time Coast

One of the best-kept secrets this side of the Colorado River converges on dynamic Randy Stodola and Dianne Chai, veteran tag-team Alley Cats now suddenly spirited back from the planet Zarkon (?) w/ paranormal life force and recharged creative juice. Not that any facet of past-tense A. Cat endeavors lacked the juice or needed recharging. Anyone hep to what's hip—then, now, and in between—will corroborate as for real the aesthetic trump cards of one of L.A.'s more time-tested trios. Tracing back to when there were Weirdos and Plugz and Zippers and Germs, when all of this was, in the parlance of Freeway Rec'ds magnate Harvey Kubernik, happening—Randy and Dianne slogged away week after week after week, dishing out liberal doses of perhaps this town's most peculiarly original and mesmerizing material. And they always look(ed) terrific too: Dianne, mad banshee woman, flailing possessed and hyperkinetic alongside the bridge of her red SG bass, bellowing harmonies and assorted voice-parts, furious, then soft and hyena-like; singer/guitarista Randy thumb/finger-picking his beat-to-shit Telecaster, amped thru nothing but a cheap fuzz and primitive Fender gear and sounding *loud* like Marshall-stack City (minus that kind of overkill).

If you can imagine some twisted sonic invocation, some really weird middle ground of "Somebody to Love" Jeff Airplane and, say, the Raw Power Stooges—scrambled somewhere in this lies the Zarkon party line. More than anything, this new platter really fixates on some zonked-out Zarkonian sphere of hopped-up blues and fast, metallic chords. Turf not terribly unfamiliar to that mined in previous A. Cat incarnations, but the produced sound quality comes closest to what the live acrobatics're all about.

The pathos, as it were (was?) the, uhm, mentality of this stuff is just real, real grim; life as dissolved, depressed; the lyrical play-by-play is particularly jolting—this first-person discourse of unrequiting hopelessness, futility. At its most playful ("I'm Lovesick of the World") the words and music, hand in hand, paint the viable (transmittable) picture.

My mouth was so dry  
I could hardly speak  
My hands were trembling  
And I felt so weak

I felt this dread  
That I can't explain  
I wish that I never  
Knew your name

You wonder what kind of demons possess the imagination of songwriter Stodola. Like, beyond the first-person diatribe, the conviction of the delivery and the imperativeness of how these tunes are personalized punch up the gloom-imbedded, sometimes larger-than-life visions—a lesson for all the would-be Hank Rollins school-of-reality disciples.

The cover of "White Rabbit," although an obvious choice (Dianne's supercharged Grace Slick impersonation is an actual improvement on the orig!), rocks with the passion conspicuously absent from the ranks of the more prominent passion-mongers.

You could list virtually each and every

one of these cleverly arranged and sparsely produced songs as fave picks to click (depending on what click amounts to these days). And because the vocal and instrumental melodies are so instantly engaging and ultimately infectious and memorable, the story lines, like an uninvited troop of earwigs, crawl into the available orifice-pathways of your head and roost in your brain! In this respect, *Riders in the Long Black Parade* could be the most successful marriage of chord and word since Blue Oyster Cult's *Tyranny and Mutation* or Procol Harum's *Shine on Brightly!* In any respect, this is a bitchin' record!

—Gregg Turner

Zarkons bassist Dianne Chai and  
guitarista Randy Stodola



## Stan Ridgway

*The Big Heat*  
I.R.S.

Maybe it's the Devo influence — on me, not on Stan Ridgway — that has me waiting for irony to come gushing out of my speakers like the killer gelato modo in Larry Cohen's film *The Stuff*. I figure anyone with such an all-American nerdy voice has got to have something up his sleeve, and the nastier, the better. The payoff turns out to be even more subversive than expected when former Wall of Voodoo singer Stan (née Standard) delivers a 7½-minute male-bonding fairy tale, "Camouflage." The title character is a Marine who comes back from the dead to save our narrator from certain death at the hands of the Viet Cong in "the jungle war of '65." It's all there: good American boys, treacherous gooks, exotic Asian locale, just like something out of one of those old men's adventure/exploitation mags. Is it camp? Is it serious? The worst part is not knowing whether a guy classy enough to name his first solo album after a *film noir* would slander this particular Asian war for independence.

Then again, you don't need to be politically correct to have retro tastes. At least Ridgway backs up his cinematic referents with cinematic techniques. A man of few words, he makes every line count for something — either an image that evokes a scene or a line of dialogue that evokes a character. Stan's mainly a man's world, but not all of his men are Johnny Rambo: the guy in "Pile Driver" is just gettin' his job done, throwin' up dust that doesn't look over much like an auteur's romantic haze. Same goes for the peculiarly buoyant loner in "Salesman." "Walkin' Home Alone" follows another lonely guy who hasn't lost his sense of humor — "even the cat she left me with is steppin' out with someone else." Jesus, this is gettin' depressin'.

Though he brought in some guest producers here and there, Ridgway maintains tight control over his sound like any good auteur. His decision to build and record in his own studio has paid off with a well-balanced sound that has lots of space for odd acoustic instruments (guitar, harmonica, etc.) to dart in and out of his synth-based arrangements. So if you're in the market for some well-crafted singer/songwriter product, this may be your cup of espresso. I just hope Stan has *Hearts and Minds* and *In the Year of the Pig* on his video-rental hit list.

—Mark Fleischmann



### Violent Femmes

*The Blind Leading the Naked*  
Slash

OK, so the Violent Femmes aren't the best band in the world, but they sure have put out one groovy new record. With the help of Talking Head Jerry Harrison, who obviously liked what happened with *Little Creatures'* accessibility, the Femmes have at least come up with a disc that isn't totally weird.

It seems as if this record divides neatly into a typical Violent Femmes side (one) and a new, improved side (two) intended for mass consumption. From the opening refrain of "Old Mother Reagan," they set the tone for an abrasive and raw collection of tunes mixing politics, religion, and sex (or lack thereof) with liberal doses of American blues and folk. Gordon Gano's trademark hormonally twisted adolescent whine is in fine form on "Special" and "Breakin' Hearts." Typ-

ical (and mighty fine) Femmes stuff until "Love and Me Make Three," on which bassist Brian Ritchie shows why Gano sings their other songs. "Candlelight Song," the last tune on the side and the oddest thing on the entire record, is so bizarre you just kind of have to giggle. I mean, come on: "Much less, much less. what's best, what's best, lifelessness, my doll is dead." Angst is not, I hope the band intended this song as humor; if not, nice day.

The record really shines and sets itself apart from previous Femmes wax on side two. "I Held Her in My Arms" is a great, hummable tune, though the theme is a Femmes standby: "Help me Lord, help me understand / What it means to be a boy, what it means to be a man." "Good Friend" is perhaps the best song on the album, and includes a bitchin' guitar solo by Harrison. It seems that Gano and Co. have had their fill of weirdness for weirdness's sake (on *Hallowed Ground*,

their last LP) and now happily play with conventional structure and even the odd guitar solo or two, occasionally poking good-natured fun at the genre, e.g., Harrison's heavy-metal axe attack on "Heartache." As usual, the instrumentals on this record are superb (particularly Brian Ritchie's bass playing), and are strengthened by guest musicians Harrison, Steve Scales, Leo Kottke, and Fred Frith.

This is a great album, one that may finally earn the Violent Femmes the attention they deserve. If you already like them, swell, but if you've never heard them before, you might play the second side a few times first before hitting the less accessible side one.

— Chris Carroll

Violent feminists (L-R) Victor DeLorenzo, Gordon Gano, and Brian Ritchie.

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Ron Delaney



## The Rolling Stones *Dirty Work* Rolling Stones

The first time I heard *Dirty Work* from start to finish, I couldn't tell whether I'd end up liking the album or writing it off. That was a good sign. *Exile on Main Street* sounded like a sludgy mess when I first heard it,

and was panned by most critics. Now it's generally agreed that *Exile* is one of the band's two or three best albums, possibly the best.

You have to learn to hear a new Stones album for what it is rather than for what you expected it to be; after 20 years' worth of records, expectations are inevitable. After living with *Dirty Work* for a week or so, I like it a lot. On it the Stones do what they do best, and do it with drive and conviction. It's a driving, high-energy rock 'n' roll record, a dance record, awash in strangled moans and snarling guitars. There's only one slow song, and it's the last one on the record.

When the Stones took on technophile Steve Lillywhite to produce *Dirty Work* (their first use of an outside producer since Jimmy Miller crashed and burned after serving from *Beggars Banquet* through *Goats Head Soup*), he seemed an odd choice. Reports emerged that Charlie Watts got angry when Lillywhite and engineer Dave Jerden spent several days

getting the drums miked just right. If so, he ought to get mad more often; he hasn't played so hard, so aggressively, in years.

Keith Richards' elemental guitar riffs have always been the band's backbone, though by now his playing is also tightly meshed with Ron Wood's. One reason *Dirty Work* works so well is that the two guitarists laid foundations for most of the songs before Watts and Wyman arrived and while Mick Jagger was recording and then promoting his solo album. When Jagger plays a major conceptual role in the planning of an album, he tends to be eclectic, even experimental; he doesn't want to be accused of Just Doing The Same Old Thing. The resulting albums sometimes sound a bit scattered, uneven — *Undercover*, for example. But Richards has a deeply felt, single-minded vision of what the Stones should sound like: that sound is supercharged, guitar-band rock 'n' roll with reggae, funk, and soul seasonings, as heard on *Dirty Work*.

Lillywhite and former reggae knob-

twister Jerden made subtle but vital contributions. The songs don't just crank up, tumble along, and stop. "One Hit (To the Body)," the band's best album opener since "Gimme Shelter," starts with hi-hat cymbal and bass drum and adds guitar parts layer by layer. But the song's texture gets sparser then denser again all the way through.

Every tune changes textures and moods to underline or contrast with the lyrics, and each has its little sonic surprises. The dub-style mixing is subtly applied to rock 'n' roll, and the album as a whole is programmed for both continuity and dramatic impact. The individual songs are substantial, too, from the apocalypse blues of "Back to Zero" to the delta-blues-inflected rocker "Had It With You" to the Stones' best-ever reggae, "Too Rude." I've been wrong before, but so far this album sounds like a keeper from start to finish.

— Robert Palmer



### **Joe Zawinul**

Dialects  
Columbia

Of all Miles's electric babies, Weather Report's Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter have most consistently challenged the boundaries of fusion, succumbing neither to commercialism, a return to yesterday's style of jazz play, nor boredom. Each release has repositioned the prior one's concepts, inverting structures, grafting African and Caribbean dance roots riddims, blowing apart the traditional idea of a "song" or even a "theme."

Shorter subverted traditional dogma from within, inventing lines on his saxes that became ideas carrying the players toward a new vision, a fresh sound, improvisation/tension-release dramas — jazz — for the '80s. Zawinul prefers an old-fashioned full-frontal attack, synthesizers sounding clarion calls of change. His album is basically synths and voices (notably that of Bobby McFerrin, along with Alfie Silas, Carl Anderson, and Dee Dee Bellson). Zawinul's rhythmic and harmonic riffs, plus his bop/funk arrangements, all add up to this LP sounding like Prince and his keyboards slipped thru a time warp darkly and hooked up with young Miles and Diz as they was helpin' invent bebop. Add some Afro-Carib spice. Zeebop!

"Zeebop", in fact, sounds like a perfect vehicle for one of Santana's instrumental "space" flights, à la "Incident at Neshabur." "Carnavalito" reeks of the bazaar, of the plazas and marquetas, of heat and palm trees. "6 a.m." is one of the darker pieces, due mainly to a looping synth bass line and slightly ominous chants that seem to voice a sense of warning. It then segues into "Walking on the Nile," in which the chants now sound — exultant? "Peace" is the only slip into what Michael Shore aptly calls "fuzak," but maybe I just don't get moved by sticky-pretty things like this.

The album's highlights are "The Harvest" and "Waiting for the Rain." This is modern fusion at full force, the vindication for all the charges ever leveled by purists at electric Miles (you know who you are). Return to Forever, Hancock and the Headhunters, and mid-'70s Santana.

—Pablo Guzmán

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# UNDERGROUND



John Maide

**T**hat there's any underground in Montreal is a minor miracle. Montreal clubs often require bands to pay them to play. Technically, the bands are charged for P.A. rental and a soundperson, but either way it costs anywhere from \$20 to play a small club like the 120-person disco Foufounes Electriques. Bands may recover that fee through door charges, but any shortfall comes out of band members' pockets. Clubs take no risk. These figures come from a band's-eye guide to Montreal put out by Og Music, the same people who offer the 11-band compilation *It Came From Canada*. A fun-time assemblage of light roots and unpolished gems, *Canada* takes its inspiration from television (both the subject and the group) when **Terminal Singlasses**' "Antenna Dilemma" kills off the kids from "Fame" with peals of shimmery fluid guitar. Dr. Frankenstein's lab seems more the setting for **My Dog Popper**'s "Acid Flashbacks" as sourly demented saxophones meet monster-grunt singing between synth bubblings and burblings reminiscent of a neon test tube from some '50s movie gone awry. **Jerry Jerry and the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra** bounces through countrified gospel with a political message, while the **Calamity Janes**' "Lorna of the Jungle" is a rough-hewn bongo rant from the tropical wilds of Ottawa. The whole album's produced with a lighthearted and gimmickless minimalism that leaves each band cleanly raw and polish-free. Nobody who allows a folk-rock revival band to call itself the **Dusty Chaps** or puts out "(You've Lost That) Radical Look" can be taking rock history too seriously. Og Music may be contacted at Box 182, Station F, Montreal, Quebec H3J 2L1, Canada. The guide for visiting bands is in issue five of Og's house newsletter, *Deja Voodoo Train*.

Somewhere between Donovan and Orange Juice, with "Oh! Susanna" inserted in the middle as a harmonica refrain, lies the kinderale of "Mr. Rabbit" as delicately told on jiggly recorder by the **Ophelias**, members of San Francisco's *Unscene*. One of 11 fledgling groups from beyond the shadows Haight-Ashbury's memory still casts, the *Unscene* artists have banded together to mix funk and '60s junk with slices and dices of postpunk and mutant pop. Mark Anthony Zanandrea of the **Cat Heads** is responsible for the album's selections and execution, so his own band is represented twice. Gruffly plodding through post-Beefheartian blues, he grumbles as lead vocalist on "I Would Kill for Suzy" while fellow Heads tackle Shaggs/Fugs territory in the fog of "Golden Gate Park."

With pillow-soft paisley jangles, Zanandrea's scenemates in **X-Tal** offer some of the album's prettiest music, sounding like a male version of Salem 66 on "Dear Friends," then spinning a strange love/hate and not-quite-gospel tale of woman-battering out of twisted psychological characters in the killer

track "Good Shepherd."

Solo artist **Ricky Williams** continues the summer of love homage in "Crawling," a gentle tabla and guitar composition, while **Pleasant Day** soulfully belt their lead vocals over sourly Lydia Luchian backup choruses in the acid blues rock of "Haunted House of Love."

On the funky side, **Three Mouse Guitars** combine marimba with a burble-pulsed beat and smooth, not-quite-doo-wop soul harmonics during "Function!?" while the **Leaches** unleash art-tinged femme funk recitations rather than sing on "He's a Boy." Given the diversity of the bands, there's a surprising singleness of quality, taste, and vision throughout most of *Unscene*. It comes from Big Green Laugh, P.O. Box 6577, San Francisco, CA 94101.

In the late '70s, Cleveland, Ohio, was rock's brave new headquarters, as Athens, Georgia, and Austin, Texas, were more recently. Since then we haven't heard much from Cleve O's homemade-music meisters, but that isn't because their raw energy or underground idealism went away. Today's Cleveland bands are captured on *They Pelted Us With Rocks and Garbage*, a 13-band sampler of primitive thunk and pound recorded in homage to the holymoley god of fuzz. There's nothing clear or pretty on *Pelted* the way there is on *Unscene*. The music's all American guitarisms layered with a primal dose of distortion. From the whispered vocals in **Shadow of Fear**'s "Now's the Time," with its softly flanged streaks, to the punky **Idiot Humans**, whose metal-edged "Dressed in Green" howls and growls for skanker's delight, *Pelted* is either delightfully or annoyingly consistent. **Faith Academy**'s slowly unfolding "Sex Like Heaven" picks up its nyarls and pools of loping guitar from the Velvet-worship school, while the **Dark**'s "Fire in the Church" fits squarely in a post-Flipper sludge groove. Taste on *Pelted* runs to rough and untutored garage rock. After Hours Records, 300 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115, is *Pelted*'s home.

Industrial music got its name in Cleveland when the 1978 wave of new rockers began experimenting with factory hisses and mechanical beats. Today the term refers to texturescapes of home-recorded mantras layered with alien chill and Germanic angst. *Dry Lungs* is a compilation of those electrical repetitions, edited by industrial music enthusiast Paul Lemos, whose writings about the harshly arty drones and endless tones of IM can be found in *Option*, *Sound Choice*, and other fanzines. Lemos's own band, **Controlled Bleeding**, and delightfully named combos including **P16DA/ Swimming Behavior of the Human Infant, Sleep Chamber, and Dog As Master** create the sounds with such sweet, light titles as "Scourge Tides," "No! No!," "The Beast 666," and

"Disastrous Consequences." Nothing hummable, danceable, or pop in these grooves. *Lungs* comes from Placebo Records, P.O. Box 23316, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

A tuatara is a big green iguanalike lizard that survives only on select islets off New Zealand. The album *Tuatara* is about an equally rare and extinction-prone species—New Zealand's independent underground rock bands. A greatest-hits compilation of sorts from the label Flying Nun, *Tuatara* runs through Nun's history in roughly chronological order, highlighting 12

R.E.M., Nun has a soft, folk-infused sound. It's carefully thought out, instrument-based music. **The Gordons** don't even get to their vocals until "Coalminer's Song" seems more than half done. Catch Tuatara from P.O. Box 3000, Christchurch, New Zealand. A U.S. pressing is available from Strange Weekend Records, 396A Frederick St., San Francisco, CA 94417.

**Diamanda Galas** is Satan's favorite vocalist, coaxing demons out of her throat in silvery crescendos. When this avant-garde opera singer performs live, she stands in front of a bank of

**Diamanda Galas is Satan's favorite vocalist, coaxing demons out of her throat in silvery crescendos.**



Kaitlin Haning

bands with previously released singles, EPs, or album tracks. **Marie and the Atom** is represented by "Isol," from the EP "Yellow Read Aloud." Like chamber music from a haunted house, it shimmers as an ethereal female voice sings church choir-style over an unsteady creep and crawl of strings. **The Clean** (who later changed their name to **The Great Unwashed**) when they found too many people expecting a squeaky gutlessness) jingle jangle through "Fish," a carefully woven guitar instrumental somewhere between an Indian mantra and a singing gondolier's quavering mandolin. Quality marks Flying Nun's products, from *Tuatara*'s near-audiophile-level pressing through its fact-filled liner notes.

Just as there's a southern American aesthetic to bands like Love Tractor and

microphones. It takes three or four mikes to capture her sound.

Moaning and undulating in smooth, bewitched flows like a possessed siren escaping Halloween, Galas shivers off in her patented glossolalia in an almost three-minute edit from her composition "Eyes Without Blood." It can be found on the compilation *A Diamond Hidden in the Mouth of a Corpse*, the most recent of New York poet **John Giorno**'s annual music and spoken-word samplers. Each year, Giorno and his friend **William S. Burroughs** put out a compilation featuring themselves and the musicians most admired among the New York loft set. This year he and Burroughs are joined by **Coil**'s tramping and pulsing instrumental "Neither His Nor Yours" as it sets a dance beat of hissing steam-iron sounds on a ping-

pong channeled stereo march. Swans member **Michael Gira** reads on his track, and **Sonic Youth** bring their raggedly jagged cutting-edge guitars to **Kim Gordon**'s sensitively moaned vocal drones. Including **Husker Du**'s 1983 recording of "Won't Change" seems a calculated bid for the affections of college radio programmers. What the other groups share in sound and image, Husker don't. Husker completists and those in quest of an alternative to pop can acquire this compilation through Giorno Poetry Systems, 222 Bowery, New York, NY 10012.

Left: Leslie Medford of the Ophelias makes like a nun; above: from the cover of *A Diamond Hidden in the Mouth of a Corpse*.

# Singles

Column by John Leland

The fallacy of the New Populists:  
Middle America  
just wants to get laid



Bonnie Graham

**A**pril is indeed the cruellest month, as anyone who has resorted to urban contemporary radio lately can tell you. The mushy fodder currently being served up takes a programming strategy that brings things to a new low—rarely more than a few inches above sea level. Whitney Houston, Jocelyn Brown, Ready for the World, Val Young, Phyllis Nelson, Cherelle—is this supposed to be music or the latest government plot to retard excessive thinking? And down the dial, Bruce Springsteen's "My Home Town" is a hit not only without being a real single but also without being a fully formed song. Amazing that so many people are still buying *Bom* in the U.S.A. seven inches at a time. This month: angry and horny rock from the Midwest, the ultimate gangster rap record, and utter nonsense from the hip-hopping suburbs. But between you and me, the best thing I heard this month was Sunnyview's reissue of "That's the Way I Like It" by K.C. and the Sunshine Band. Truly classic shit never dies.

**Big Black: "Il Duce" b/w "Big Money"**  
(Homestead)

Chicago has great hot dogs, low rents, and a very nice lake (or so I'm told). Like most Midwestern cities, it has a deadbeat club scene and a half-dozen really good bands trying to survive in spite of same. In the Midwest, the spirit of '77 and '78 dies hard, and because the bands never really had a chance to outgrow anything, they still adhere to the tenets of the Buzzcocks, Wire, the Fall, and the Gang of Four. In the Midwest, bands are angry and horny (and angry about being horny). "I'm God's gift to women," sang Steve Albini on Big Black's last record, "Racer X," "except for that college girl / I'll kill her." This new 7-inch is characteristically abrasive and angular, but it's the biggest Black yet. Instead of sketching his usual jarring rhythmic skeleton, Albini overloads these mechanical riffs with scraping, junkyard guitar. There's information at the bottom of the sonic heap trying to fight its way to the surface and foreground material trying to distort itself into the background. A great record, if you don't mind Albini's (also characteristic) asshole notions about Mussolini.

**Original Concept: "Knowledge Me" b/w "Can You Feel It?"** (Def Jam)

Sheer nonsense, as funny as it is degrading. "Knowledge Me" is the aural equivalent of a Popeye festival: a transcendently stupid series of asides. These two fat boys talk shit for five minutes like only a couple of b-boys from suburban Long Island can do. In voices that combine the best of Wolfman Jack and Brian Keith, they talk about hanging out at the mall or going over to their friends' houses, all in slang that makes Valspeak sound elegant. I mean, like, every line begins, "yo, cuz," and every verse ends, "knowledge me, a-

man," with any number of "chillin'"s and "illin'"s lying in between. Colloquial English has rarely suffered such rough treatment. I only hope they meant it as a satire of hip-hop slang and not a lexicon. "Can You Feel It" is a collage walking tour through the electronic strata of rhythms and melodies.

#### Lovebug Starski: "House Rocker" (Epic)

Symptomatic of the old school's failure to meet the challenge of the new hip-hop generation is a paucity of fresh subject matter. LL Cool J invents new themes each time out, and Slick Rick developed a new rap sexuality; Starski, an old Bronx vet, just lists the records he's made. When the beat revolves, he has nothing new to say. However, Starski's producer, D.St., had a loud and striking answer for the new jacks. While most current rap records strip all the music out, paring the sound down to the beat box, D.St. piles on the music. "House Rocker"'s explosive rock dynamic is so heavy-handed but so artful that it makes Starski's lame rap moot. The record jumps monolithically from heavy metal bombast to Stanley Clarke-type funk-fusion to gutbucket hand-drum go go. And with each jump, it just kicks into a higher gear. I've long thought that hip hop would become more musical again in '86, following Full Force's "Alice"; this single gets musical in a whole nuther direction. I've also thought D.St. would emerge as one of the genre's most inventive producers. Despite some rocky moments, you couldn't ask for better evidence.

#### Schoolly-D: "PSK—What Does it Mean?" b/w "Gucci Time" (Schoolly-D)

First the good news: this is an incredibly cool record. With a malignantly hypnotic dust beat and an ill rapping style, "PSK" may be the most dramatically fresh hardcore hip-hop record since LL Cool J's "I Need a Beat." Like that record, it distorts reality with a minimum of tools. Reverse psychedelia: it wipes your mind clear of all visual images with its primitive beat. Now the bad news: this is a bad record. PSK are the initials of the Park Side Killers street gang, and these songs are about picking up prostitutes and pulling pistols. Or, as Schoolly-D says, "how one homeboy became a man." Whatever happened to bar mitzvahs? Even given the reigning preeminence of sound over words, being the ultimate gangster rock record still has its drawbacks.

#### Nu Shooz: "I Can't Wait" (Atlantic)

At a certain point, formula music leaps headlong into a blessed state of grace. On this plane, all considerations of triteness and aesthetic impoverishment fade into irrelevance, and the formula itself becomes a thing of beauty. The derivative machinery behind this Nu Shooz single is so fully realized that the record isn't a mere earthy cliché, but a Platonic ideal of cliché. Utterly insubstantial and hackneyed, "I Can't Wait" is appealing in a way that real music could scarcely be.

With its pro forma keyboard bass, Emulator doodles, and anonymous sextant, it's the ultimate zipless fuck: no commitment, no guilt, no danger of it becoming an ax murderer when you get it home. You can listen to this record as many times as you want and still not have any strong impressions that human beings actually made it. In other words, it's the perfect disco record. Not exactly ear candy; it's more like an ear orgasm.

#### The June Brides: "No Place Called Home" (In Tape import EP)

Jesus, these bands are everywhere. The June Brides are five apparently sensitive guys from England who believe in romance and melody—to the extent that they temper their quiet storm with an occasional mournful violin or trumpet. Stuff to take to your summer house or to listen to early in the morning (definitely not late at night). On the whole, endearing for its overall pleasantness, but innocuous for the same reason. Only on the honestly superb title track do the JBs punch through the EEL veneer with their homespun folk spontaneity. More mope-in than hootenanny, but restless because it's a mess.

#### Soul Asylum: "Tied to the Tracks" b/w "Long Way Home" (Twin Tone)

More classic thrash trash from Middle America. Rough, artless, deliberately crude. And however poppy it gets, it's more propulsive than buoyant. But Soul Asylum, perhaps in large part due to Bob Mould's production, does it in a Hüsker Du style. That is, with pop songs pushed to the breaking point by too much drums, bass, guitar, and—especially—vocals. Like Mould and Grant Hart, Soul Asylum's Dan Murphy and David Pirner load their hooks with screaming harmonies that refuse to fade into wallpaper. When they sing together, in unison (ha!) or in harmony (ha ha!), their voices sound more like a pileup, a multiple-car accident, or a race to the finish line than your standard pop polyphonies. Without any great show of inspiration or originality, Soul Asylum comes through with a wildly hairy pop single.

#### Mekons: "Crime and Punishment" (Sin import EP)

The cover of the Mekons' 1979 debut album tellingly showed a monkey at a typewriter and the typewritten title, *The Quality of Mercy Is Not Striven*. In '79, these unwashed anarchists from Leeds embraced punk's already fading romantic attachment to amateurism. But as the punks developed their musicianship and studio skills (see *London Calling* and the Slits' *Cut*, released the same year), the Mekons found themselves as critical outsiders rather than one of the motley crew,

Opposite page: David Pirner of Soul Asylum; right: the Mekons, reeling from a punk hangover, find another downwardly mobile public forum.

and their music suffered from a damning sense of withdrawal. On this live radio EP and the companion *Fear and Whiskey* album, they once again find a downwardly mobile public forum for their amateurism in the drunken and failed conventions of roots. The bastardized country songs on "C & P" reel with precariously tuned violin and harp and wailow drunkenly in failed love, failed friendship, failed aspirations, and the bitter comforts of alcohol. These aren't the ersatz Fogertized roots of the Del Fuegos or Beat Farmers; the ugly colors on this EP are as unabashedly English as those of "Garageland" or the Three Johns' "Brainbox" (singer Jon Langford doubles as a John). In this despairing pub mess, it finally makes sense again for the Mekons to switch instruments when they get too good at the ones they're playing. After the idealism has been betrayed, "Crime and Punishment" is like a punk hangover.

#### SIDESWIPES

One of the hottest records in hip-hop clubs these day is Falco's repackaged "Rock Me Amadeus" b/w "Vienna Calling" (A&M). Though it lacks the disciplined integrity and a bit of the explosive jolt, this looks like this year's "Shout." If Mozart only knew . . . The umpteenth issue of the Pet Shop Boys' wryly antiseptic "West End Girls" (EMI) proves there's no substitute for a well-dressed apocalypse. Like Diamond Dogs staged as a fashion show rather than a theatrical event. When all hell breaks loose, you'll want something with exaggerated shoulders that tapers sharply at the waist, maybe in a pastel gray . . . "Moments in Love" by—get this—Trevor Horn and Paul Morley With the Art of Noise



John Biggs

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Maritha Gienon

# Go, Charlie, Go

"The beat's so lonely," Charlie Sexton sang in his very first single; "I'll bet it's lonely at the top." At 17, he's about to find out.

Article by Bart Bull

There's an old story that fits here, fits closer than coincidence. It's more a myth than a story, actually, although we all know it was written by Chuck Berry. It starts way out in the sticks, deep down in Louisiana close to New Orleans, way back up in the pines among the evergreens. There stood a log cabin made of earth and wood—this story begins rustic enough to stir the roots-rockiest heart—where lived a country boy named Johnny B. Goode. He wasn't fond of school, wasn't much for reading or writing, but he could play his guitar just like ringing a bell. Matter of fact, people passing by would stop and say, "Oh my, but that little country boy can play."

Now it happened that Johnny was lucky enough to have no father figure around and a truly understanding mother. This was swell, because it meant he didn't have to worry about his parents cramping his style. His mother was so understanding, in fact, that she told him, "Son, some day you will be a man. And you will be the leader of a big ol' band." (This being the South, and out in the sticks, Mrs. Goode had something of an accent, you see.) "Many people will come from miles around to see you play your music when the sun goes down. Maybe some day your name will be in lights."

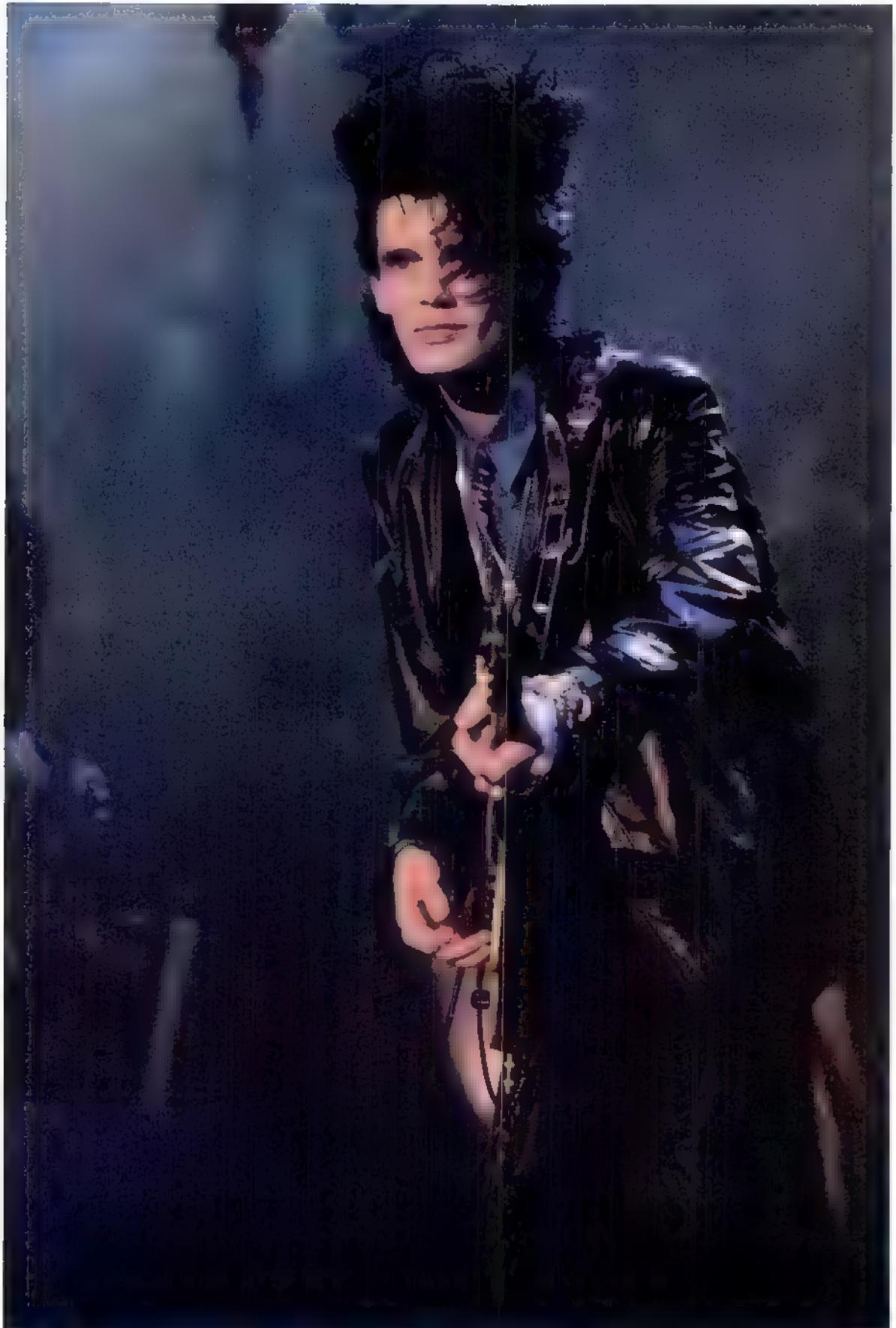
And then she gave him one last piece of advice. It was the same piece of advice he got from everyone, advice that shoved him out into the world and yet somehow managed to turn his very name into a warning. It was advice that seemed, in an odd way, to contradict itself. "Go!" she told him, "Go!" And everyone else around him joined right in with her. "Go, Johnny, go! Go! Go, Johnny, go! Go! Go, Johnny, go! Go, Johnny B. Goode!"

Johnny B. Goode's story may have been a pack of lies, but it was a great pack of lies—a myth, in other words—and just the kind of lies all those sweet little sixteens who were really rockin' on Bandstand would like to have dreamed themselves into. Nobody said Chuck Berry's mother raised a fool.

There are other ways of telling this story but one of them stops being the one-size-fits-all story of Johnny B. Goode and turns into something more specific, into the story of Little Charlie from Austin, Texas. The April issue of *Star Hits*, a fan magazine targeted at young teens, took an opening shot at telling that story when it featured a small black-and-white photo of a brooding young man in a column called "Get Smart." ("Losing sleep over questions about music? Jackie will get you the answer.") The handsome young man in the photo had dark eyes, tousled hair, a jutting jaw line, but most prominent of all were his cheekbones—he looked a great deal like Matt Dillon with much of the air let out—and his remarkably full lips. The photo was captioned "Charlie Sexton: The lips that leveled Texas. And he can sing!"

"Jackie," came a query from some sleepless *Star Hits* readers, "could you tell us something about Charlie Sexton?" She could indeed, although not much more than the basics because Charlie Sexton was not doing interviews with magazines like *Star Hits*. "Charlie Sexton and his lips were born some 17 years ago in San Antonio, Texas (though he was raised in Austin). Charlie's packed quite a lot of

Above left: Even in 1982 Joe Ely (left) could appreciate the imminent teen appeal and chilling chops of lead guitarist "Little Charlie" Sexton. Right: "Small Charles" today.



Mark Weiss



experience into those 17 years, playing his first honest-to-goodness gig at age 11 (!) as lead guitarist for Joe Ely. Various groups that Charlie's been in have toured with Ely as well as the Clash, and he's also recorded with Bob Dylan, Don Henley, Ron Wood and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones (!!). On his debut LP *Pictures for Pleasure*, Charlie played guitar, bass and keyboards as well as writing and singing. He says he'll listen to everything from Hendrix to hardcore, but "If it ain't moaning, I don't like it." For more moans, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Rumors and Info, P.O. Box 69470, Los Angeles, CA 90069."

For the moment, Charlie and Charlie's management and Charlie's record company and all the many people involved with Charlie's career would rather not read about Charlie's lips in the pages of *Star Hits*. Or 16 or *Tiger Beat* or *Super Teen* or any of those orally fixated lip-worship magazines. Duran Duran have done just fine for themselves, but musicians who make their bow in the teen magazines have traditionally had a problem keeping their careers alive after the typical 18-month fling with the estrogen-inflamed girls of America. There are far fewer teens today than in the late-'50s-through-late-'60s baby-boom heyday of the fan magazines, and the statistical potential for stimulating record-buying glands has diminished accordingly. More important—at least since the epiphany of the Beatles and the advent of the Monkees, since the onset of pop music's pretensions to high art—a stigma about the concept of "teen idol" has appeared. It signifies something manufactured, mass-produced, merchandised, manipulated—unlike, say, Elvis or the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. MCA Records would prefer not to read about Charlie Sexton's lips in *Star Hits*.

They'd also rather not read record reviews in more mainstream publications like *Rolling Stone* that say things about Charlie's debut like "shamelessly overstated and contrived" or "lonely leather-boy posturing." They would rather not read the open letter to Charlie from a columnist in Charlie's hometown paper, the *Austin Chronicle*, that signs off with a simple "Your album stinks." According to the *Chronicle*, MCA spent \$400,000 making that album with blue-chip producer Keith (Simple Minds, Billy Idol, *The Breakfast Club*) Forsey, after signing Charlie to one of the most lucrative contracts an unknown has ever received. The reviews and articles the MCA publicity department has assembled into the Charlie Sexton press kit have headlines such as "Rock 'n' roll's next superstar?" and "Charlie Sexton has all the luck but he worked hard to earn it." Thus far, it's a slim package.

**M**CA's publicity department prefers to make certain before granting any interviews that the proposed writer approves of Charlie's album—a practice is also made of checking after the interview to find out what the writer thinks of Charlie now—but there should be little chance of any unforeseen problems of opinion tonight. After Charlie gives an interview to radio's resolutely uncontroversial Westwood One network, a woman who works for MCA will do another interview with him—questions supplied by MCA publicity—that will be distributed to cooperative radio stations overseas. Even so, a publicist from MCA is on hand. All that's missing is Charlie Sexton.

Not exceptionally late by rock-star standards, or even those of most 17-year-olds, Charlie shows up for his 8 PM appointment at 9:30 or so. Dressed in black, with a startling shock of jet-black hair teased MTV-high, he seems to lower tall when he comes into the studio's control booth, but he's not so tall as he is gaunt. He's not especially tall at all, just slender, slim, thin, spare, excruciatingly skinny, excessively lean. He kisses the publicists, shakes hands with everyone he doesn't kiss, and the interviews commence.

The Westwood One interviewer is a little more in-



## Charlie's arms are spectacularly pale and skinny, so skinny and so pale he could be a guitar player from England.

terested in the names Charlie has played with than Charlie himself is, and if the questions focus on famous names, on Charlie's age, and if they attempt to divine the degree to which Charlie had control over the making of his album, there really isn't a whole lot else to talk about at this point. All that's known about Charlie Sexton so far has been supplied by MCA, and if Charlie has amassed a distinguished string of sex crimes or criminal tax evasions, his record company literature hasn't gotten around to mentioning them.

The woman with the MCA-supplied questions is next up, and she and Charlie horse around like old friends before they get down to business. "How old were you when you became interested in the guitar and how did you learn to play?" she begins. He was four, and he taught himself. The handy thing about her questions is that while they don't demand much in the way of answers—especially once you've scanned his official biography—they do manage to give a very accurate sense of the type of marketing MCA has in mind, an inverted glimpse of the issues MCA would rather see sidestepped. They also demonstrate a very sincere contempt for the process of journalism. When this is all over with, the woman's voice will be edited out and DJs in places like Japan and Australia and New Zealand will be able to read off the stock list of questions and then plug their own voices into an official Charlie Sexton interview. "Who were your early influences?" she wants to know.

Charlie is chain-smoking, but that doesn't mean he's nervous in any way—he always chain-smokes a blue Marlboro cloud. Already an old hand at this sort of thing, he stretches his lanky length back into the studio chair and makes certain not to clank his bracelets into the microphone. "And your voice—you have a really big voice. Did you have a lot of tutoring or vocal lessons?" The answer, not altogether surprisingly, is no. "You were pretty young when you started working professionally, weren't you?" Yes. "Did you feel you had to make a lot of personal sacrifices in those times, when you were that young, to be working profes-

sionally?" No. "In the booklet that's included with *Biograph*, Bob Dylan's album, he mentions his hopes for your success. Have you worked with Dylan?" Yes. "And Don Henley too?" Yes. "When you write a song, do you write the lyrics first or the music?" Music. "This is your first album, isn't it?" Yes.

If the answers are only about as intriguing as the questions, that's not Charlie's fault. He's unfailingly courteous, helpful to a fault, surprisingly articulate for a 17-year-old, and the only unsettling element that enters into the process at all is the British accent that wobbles in and out of Charlie's statements—"stage" becomes "styge," "playing" becomes "plying," "date" becomes "dye." It's not entirely unexpected, especially in an impressionable 17-year-old who's just returned from his first trip to England—"You've just gotten back from England, right?"—but then so much of this process, this interview, seems expressly designed to prove that Charlie Sexton is anything but an impressionable 17-year-old. "Is it a problem to be working with musicians that are older than you when you're the one that's calling the shots?" No. "How did you come to work with Keith Forsey on this album?" Charlie called him. "Did you co-produce the album with him or did he take control?" Yes; no. "Did you co-write 'Beat's So Lonely' with Keith?" "And was that your choice for the first single?" "And 'Impressed' is the second single?" "And you just shot a video for this track, didn't you?" "Would you like to tell us about the video for 'Impressed'?"

The woman from MCA wraps up the interview neatly—"Are we likely to see you in New Zealand before too long?" "Are we likely to see you in Australia before too long?"—Charlie knocks out a long list of station IDs—"Hi, this is Charlie Sexton, and you're listening to . . ."—and tonight's duties are nearly over.

**T**he only thing like actual information to be gleaned from this affair—and "gleaned" may be precisely the right word, in the antique sense of impoverished peasants searching the ground for scattered kernels of grain after the harvesters have stripped the stalks—is that Charlie is getting just a bit weary of questions that seek to link him with such aged name brands as Bob Dylan and Don Henley and Joe Ely. In the manner of 17-year-olds everywhere, Charlie gives the impression he'd like to be talking about something more contem-

porary—himself, for instance. When the first interviewer asked him about Dylan, Charlie explained how MCA and Universal Pictures (MCA's movie-making division) had been making a movie about high school, and Ron Wood and Keith Richards were doing a song for it. "Someone got the idea, 'Hey, let's get Charlie to sing on it with Woody and Keith and play guitar!'" Wood and Charlie got along famously, and Charlie ended up on the song "It's Not Easy." "I think one of the reasons he liked my playing is because I grew up on the same sort of blues and stuff like he did." Charlie stayed an extra week in New York with Wood, and one night Dylan came down to the studio. Somewhat less than awestruck but willing to do his most respectful best, Charlie says, "It was a, uh, great night."

Another archaic brand name Charlie is tired of hearing about is David Bowie. There are times on Charlie's debut video/single, "Beat's So Lonely," when it's possible to close your eyes and hear Bowie revving up toward his most manfully earnest soul croon. "I listened to a lot of Bowie, yes," Charlie told the Westwood One interviewer. "I think he's rather a mastermind. But I mean, first off, anyone that's got a low voice is going to sound like Bowie." He pronounces it, Bowie-style, as "Bao-way." "I mean, it used to be that, 'Oh, you sound like Elvis.' And plus, Bowie stole everything from Elvis too, so I guess we're even, huh?" He chuckles once, quietly, defensively, to himself.

Pressed to come up with someone contemporary whose music excites him, he hesitates. "I think Grace Jones is doing something really cool. It's like she's making records that I feel express like, 'Don't worry about it, this is music, just dance,' you know? 'Slave to the Rhythm.'"

That rhythm-slave stuff would probably really tickle them back in Austin, where the local guitar loyalists are plenty annoyed by the kid they all used to know as Little Charlie—or among the irreverent, Small Charlies—a blues-picking rockabilly prodigy whose band was called the Sextones. Charlie left town a roots-rocker, they say, and the next thing you know, he's the omniscient English accent drifting over Keith Forsey's uprooted megamix production, with the two songs he wrote all by himself buried in the middle of side two. According to an MCA publicity handout, Charlie's meeting with Forsey was almost a throwback to the glamorous days when movie stars were discovered sipping sodas in drugstores. "I was working at the Record Plant remixing a Psychedelic Furs song," Forsey is quoted, "when he walked through that door and looked at me, that was it!" Breathlessly, the same handout has Forsey saying of their work together, "If you listen to the radio, when you hear his record, you're gonna see his face. You're gonna see his persona, his character, and his charisma. Just by listening to the record."

Again and again, over and over, Charlie tells his interviewers that the decision to have the record sound the way it does was his and his alone, that MCA left the decisions in his 17-year-old hands. He began his record with Mick Ronson, guitarist for Bowie during the Ziggy Stardust days, but says he wasn't happy with the results and fired him, then went looking for another producer. He began anew, this time with Forsey, but after a few tracks were completed, Charlie says he was unhappy once more. It was too much of a guitar record, he says. They started once more, settling on a typical Forsey sound, the type of sound that has a proven track record of appeal to both sexes, and this time the results were released.

"That's not the way we do it here," one young woman from Austin says, taking it upon herself to speak for the entire local music scene. Whether she's referring to Charlie's move to Hollywood, to his dumping members of his band once he hit the big time, to the way he's ditched his earlier roots, to Keith Forsey's dramatic Cinerama production, or to the whole package, the message from Charlie's hometown is clear: That's Not The Way We Do It Here.

Charlie's gotten the message, and he sent one back

## MCA would prefer not to read about Charlie Sexton's lips in Star Hits.

by way of one of the music papers that interviewed him in England. "I figure I'm young an' I'm gonna do it right the first time, not like all these other assholes." Then the writer editorially interjected the names Zeitgeist and True Believers, both Austin bands. "Look," said Charlie, "I don't wish to be rude but those bands in Austin, they aren't gonna do *nuthin'* 'cause you gotta leave, you're just stifled in Austin. . . . Now I'm teachin' those people in Austin a lesson, which is, 'Forget what's trendy,' all this 'Don't make an album in L.A., make it in a shitty studio in Austin' bullshit. 'Cause that's the reason why all those bands that haven't 'betrayed' Austin are gonna be playing those clubs, then breakin' up an' workin' in burger stands while I'm still making records." It was an arrogant, hurtful thing to say about the people and the place that gave him his start. He sounded like a 17-year-old boy with hurt feelings.



Greg Gorman

**A**n MCA publicist is on hand again, of course, but on the day after Charlie's radio interviews, the sound in the rehearsal studio is a lot less like the album's ambiguous big beat and a lot more like the classic crunchy-chord, guitar-wringing rock you might expect from a skinny 17-year-old prodigy wearing a black T-shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Charlie's arms are spectacularly pale and skinny, so skinny and so pale he could be a guitar player from England. He's cheerful and enthusiastic and professionally casual, and he listens dutifully as the keyboard player calls out the tunes in their new order.

Charlie and his band are getting ready for their New York unveiling—there's some chance of them appearing on *Saturday Night Live*—and making a small pretense at approximating the between-song patter and intimacies of a live show. "Blah blah blah New York," Charlie says into the microphone by way of introducing "It's Not Easy"; "Blah blah blah Keith Richards, blah blah blah Ron Wood, blah blah blah goes like this."

He's quite a guitar jock, Charlie is, chopping off crisp rhythm chords and whanging the whammy-bar playfully when he switches to lead and sticking a freshly lit Marlboro up amongst the tuning keys with all the carefree ease of Keith Richards himself. It's plain to see he's having a fine time and he's more than ready to hit the road at last. When one of the tunes rushes

along at too quick a clip, the keyboard player waits until it ends, then says, "OK—we won't do it that way."

"OK—we won't do it that way," Charlie says.

The encores are a molasses-slow version of Elvis's "Don't Be Cruel," and a straight-up version of Bowie's "Rebel, Rebel." Charlie's rocking now, and he turns to grin his engaging grin at the keyboard player, who's busy looking the other way. Charlie swings around and looks to the other guitarist and the bass player but they're simply staring back at him, pumping the beat, not grinning at all. Charlie's grin goes away.

After the rehearsal, a couple of the guys in the band smoke a joint while Charlie goes off with a woman who has chosen a stage wardrobe for him—"Do you love it?" she asks, holding up a red jumpsuit arrangement with padded shoulders. The band's musical director is the keyboard player, Scott Wilk, an associate of Forsey's, who had a record out on Capitol six years ago under one of those new-wave names like Scott Wilk and the Whatevers that were certain critical death back then. "I think that in the development stage Charlie was at when he did the record, he fell prey maybe to his chameleonlike tendencies. I was slagged off on the Scott Wilk and the Waves record *horribly* in various publications for pulling an Elvis Costello. I really fell victim badly to that charge of appropriating someone else's style. I think that maybe the first record you make, unless you're . . . I guess I'm saying I'm inclined to be more forgiving, because I know that I've transcended my own initial chameleon tendencies, and I know Charlie's going to. And I already see it on stage, from watching him every night, dropping the Bowiemisms, and dropping other isms."

"He was not necessarily served very well in certain respects by the procedure that Keith used in making the record." Scott pauses, then plunges. "I don't know, Keith is a friend of mine, I think he does really, *really* good work in general, but I think that it might have been just a little bit over. . . ." A pause. "Left in the oven a little bit too long. A few of the rough edges got sanded off." Charlie has looked the clothes over without trying anything on, and now he's banging away on the drums.

*From the booklet enclosed with Bob Dylan's Biograph collection:*

"Rock 'n' roll, I don't know, rhythm and blues or whatever, I think it's gone. In its pure form. There are some guys true to it, but it's so hard. You have to be so dedicated and committed. And everything is against it. I'd like to see Charlie Sexton become a big star, but the whole machine would have to break down right now before that could happen."

There's another interview to do tomorrow, on the expansive patio that extends out from one of the fourth-floor publicity offices at MCA. The publicist isn't sitting in this time but her glass door has been left open just in case. "Oy, vey ist mir—"teen idol!" she says dramatically when she spots the dread phrase applied to Charlie in a local weekly's gossip column. No sooner does Charlie stretch his legs and light a Marlboro than she has to apologize for the interruption: Irving—Irving Azoff, head of MCA Records and chief at Front Line Management, which steers the careers of Chicago, Heart, Michael McDonald, Stevie Nicks, and Don Henley, among others—would like to see Charlie for a few minutes. "This is the man who signs the checks," the publicist says.

"It's like getting called down to see the principal," Charlie says when he gets back. From the patio, you can see that the MCA Records building is just one part of the entire MCA/Universal complex—office after office, opening up onto patio after patio. And in the hills of Universal City, off in the near distance, just this side of the Universal Amphitheatre, you can see what appears to be an honest-to-goodness Chinese pagoda. Charlie settles back in again, puts his feet back up,

*continued on p. 73*



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# FEAR AND LOATHING IN HUNTER THOMPSON

The original gonzo journalist—still crazy after all these years.  
Article by Harold Conrad

Huge brains, small necks, weak muscles, and fat wallets—these are the dominant characteristics of the '80s—the generation of swine.

—HUNTER S. THOMPSON

**T**hat's the way Hunter Thompson sees the pursuers of Ronald Reagan's American dream—a collage of funless, greedy little people in a dollar-bill-green world. The above is from his *San Francisco Examiner* column, soon to become nationally syndicated.

The quintessential outlaw journalist is back in hot print. His welcome was splashed all over San Francisco with eight-column, page-one plugs over the newspaper's masthead and TV blurbs in which he starred personally. Even the competition was intrigued. Peter Anderson, of the nearby *Marin County Journal*, wrote:

"The man who writes best-sellers like *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, whose ideal breakfast consists of omelets stuffed with psychedelic mushrooms, a dozen beers, six Bloody Marys, and a reefer to be named later, sounds to me like, well, an ideal columnist."

The competition can make small talk about Thompson's lifestyle, but if he gets off his ass, they better shape up. He's a damn good reporter who writes in a perverse orbit of his own, leading you down weird paths strewn with fools and scamps.

His outrageous style and disdain for the establishment was "discovered" in the late '60s and his following grew as he kept turning out best-sellers and scintillating magazine articles. He started out as a tame, orthodox reporter for the *National Observer*, but the pace was too slow, and he set out to do a book on the Hell's Angels. The bike outlaws didn't just chase him off, they kicked the shit out of him first, but he did the book, and it was his first big winner.

Thompson found his niche with the new-wave publications in the mid-'60s, where his outrageous style was stamped gonzo journalism. First he wrote for *Scanlan's* and then moved over to the then budding *Rolling Stone*. Once he got in the groove, he batted out two more best-sellers, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*. *The Great Shark Hunt*, a compilation of his works, was his best best-seller.

When his output slowed down, he forged a link with the new generation in the late '70s and '80s through his college lecture tours. The stories of his preposterous lifestyle became an introduction to his work for many of the uninitiated, but the legend is no longer enough for them. They're hungry for more product, and they want to know what he's been up to.

Only Hunter Thompson knows what Hunter Thompson has been up to, so if you seek the answer, you must go to the mountain, literally—outside Aspen, Colorado, where Hunter lives. But there is a slight problem here. Visitors are not welcome and he despises interviews.

I call Thompson and tell him I'd like to do a piece



Michael Dodge III

on him. In reply I hear heavy breathing, but no words, and it wouldn't take a psychologist to tell he isn't crazy about the idea. Finally he says, "Well . . . uh . . . I don't know." More silence, then he says, "I haven't seen you in a long while. Yeah, maybe it will be fun."

As the shuttle plane taking me from Denver to Aspen skirts the snow-crested Rockies, I wonder what the hell I'm doing up here. Thompson didn't answer any of my four calls to confirm my visit. This crazy bastard could just as well be in Mozambique or Katmandu, but when I register at the Inn of Aspen an hour later, the desk clerk tells me, "Dr. Thompson left word he'll meet you here for dinner."

I wait in the room for two hours. No Thompson. I head for the hotel lobby, and as I'm walking down the hall I see this figure coming towards me. He's solidly built, erect, square-jawed, wearing a heavy windbreaker and a baseball cap pulled down over dark shades that deny eye contact. He looks like Central Casting's version of a CIA guy on the prowl, but it's Dr. Thompson himself, the least likely candidate for such a role.

As the gap between us narrows, he starts apologizing for I don't know what, because I can't understand what the hell he's saying. Now I know the night is wasted. It's obvious that Dr. Thompson has already made his day sampling spirits and ambrosias.

It's tough enough to understand Thompson's machine-gun delivery when he's straight, but when he's on full throttle he sounds like he's talking in Morse code, and tonight he's on full throttle.

Maria Khan, Thompson's associate, joins us at dinner. She is a cool, intelligent, beautiful young lady who tries to separate sanity from chaos. Hunter keeps babbling on. Finally he realizes I'm not interpreting his high-velocity chatter and he slows up.

Now I see he has something important on his mind. He reaches into a shopping bag, pulls out a poster, unfolds it with some difficulty, then points to the photo in the center. It's a picture of Thompson when he ran for sheriff of Pitkin County many years ago. Below the picture a caption reads, "Would you sell this man peyote?"

It's a funny picture—*weird-funny*. His head is completely shaved, his face has a pallor, and although he is wearing the obligatory dark shades, you know those eyes are seeing pictures in another world. He looks like a stoned alien who has been left behind by the mother ship. I laugh at the picture. Hunter bristles, then points to it again. "Has to be on the cover," he says.

"Cover? What cover?" I ask.

"The cover of SPIN. No cover, no story."

For a second I think he's putting me on. He leans back and quaffs the Bloody Mary. He is now behind a panoply of glass and spirits in full color: a double Bloody Mary in tomato-red, two Heineken soldiers in dark green, and a margarita, opaque in the light, the glass rimmed in salty snow.

He sips the margarita, then takes three small



Nichols Devore III

pieces of notepaper out of his pocket and tosses them on the table. "It's all there," he says. The notepaper is marked pages 1, 2, and 3. The writing is barely legible, but I get the drift. It's instructions on how to handle the picture.

Now I know he's serious. I see I'm going to have to play the game. I say, "I don't know whether this can work. I don't have much lead time."

"Then you better get the picture to New York right away," he answers. "There's a Federal Express agency at the desk."

I see I have no other option. "OK," I lie. "It will be taken care of."

Now he's all business. He leans forward in his chair. "What have you got in mind for this story?"

"I'd like to do a piece on you up at your house, your workspace," I tell him.

He holds up his hand, palm out, like an Indian chief about to make a benediction, then says, "My good friend Harold Conrad, he may visit my house, can stay six weeks if he wants, or as long as he likes . . . Harold Conrad the journalist is barred." Then he dives into a second helping of chocolate seven-layer cake, irrigated with chartreuse.

It's several hours after dinnertime when Hunter starts back to his mountain. Maria, lagging behind, stops to say, "Don't worry, everything will work out. I'll see that he calls you around 1 tomorrow."

**M**aria calls a little after noon the next day. "Hunter's embarrassed about last night. I'm sorry about this confusion. We'll meet for breakfast at the Woody Creek Tavern around 1:30. Taxi drivers know the place."

I had been warned about renting a car. They're not safely equipped for some of the more hazardous, icy roads. A wrong slide and you're over and down a thousand-foot precipice. But the taxis have four-wheel drives and are as tenacious as mountain goats. I wondered how the hell Hunter, who drives as though he is on the Indianapolis Speedway no matter where he is, made it safely on these treacherous roads over the years. I'm sure he rides with the devil.

## "There's no more drug culture. It's just big business, a foul business."

Thompson's mystery house is high above the hamlet of Woody Creek, which is in a gully below, some 10 miles from the glitz of Aspen. It has two storefronts—a post office and the tavern—adjoining each other, and that's it for the business end of Woody Creek. There are spells when this town is Hunter's only link with the living.

Woody Creek Tavern is a comfortable place that smells of good home cooking. It has a bar, a jukebox, and a dozen tables. The walls are covered with pictures, postcards, and newspaper clippings, mostly of local interest.

I find one clipping interesting. It is a column about a Denver television crew that hung around the Tavern for two days, waiting to catch Thompson on film. In despair they searched out and found his house, but were chased off the property by Hunter, the once-almost-sheriff of Pitkin County.

It's now 2:30. He's an hour late. I call his house. The service answers. "No, Mr. Thompson is not picking up." Mike, the guy behind the bar, says, "You can't put the clock on Hunter. If he says he'll be here, he'll be here." But Mike doesn't understand about editorial deadlines.

It's now 3 o'clock. I call a taxi and start out for Hunter's house. Ask a native how to get to Thompson's and he'll ask how well you know him, then, no matter what you say, he'll give you the wrong directions. But I got a map from Terry McDonell, an editor and mutual friend of Hunter's and mine, before I left New York.

I have been warned that I would be under penalty of death if I revealed the directions in print, so let's say the house is way up there on the mountain. The site is called Owl Farm, and the house is a sturdy garrison of logs and glass, facing a postcard panorama with 50 wild acres behind it.

I see both cars in the snowy driveway, but there are no tracks, which means no car has left today. He has to be in there. As I approach the door I see a room that has been tacked onto the front of the house. A huge peacock is sitting on a shelf, his great tail hanging down in gorgeous colors as he peers through the glass. This anteroom is known as the Peacock Hotel.

I rap on the entrance door hard, and two female peacocks, the ugly half of the species, scramble and give me dirty looks through mean, beady eyes. I'm waiting for someone to answer the door. You'd figure that anybody who would breed and mother peacocks, tropical birds, 8,000 feet up in the Rockies can't be all bad.

No one is answering. I trudge through three feet of snow to the back entrance and rap some more. Still no answer. I'm not about to hang around up there and freeze, so I go back to the tavern to find out if there is any message.

I tell Mike I was just up at Thompson's house but couldn't rouse him. "Did he shoot at you?" Mike asks complacently.

"Shoot at me?" I ask. "Does he do that?"

"Yeah," he says. "Sometimes."

Zip . . . back to my hotel in Aspen. I'm delving into airline schedules when the phone rings. It's Hunter, the other Hunter, not the ogre of last night. It's like I just arrived. He tells me he's been in the shower for an hour, probably a cop-out for not answering my pounding on the door. "Meet me at the Tavern in an hour. We'll have dinner and go up to the house and get this thing started."

With trepidation, I take a taxi back to the Tavern. He and Maria are already there. I see a couple of cowboys at the bar and some local people at the tables. It is made plain that tourists are not welcome here.

I know Hunter takes it for granted that I understand the rigors of reentry after a tough night. I never mention the crazy cover-story pictures or any of the ultimatums presented the night before. Neither does he. It never happened.

Now he's solicitous and polite. People seem to forget that Thompson was southern, raised a God-fearing, well-mannered little Kentucky gentleman, and that's what he is when he's straight. Fortunately, he's not straight all that much. I like Hunter when he's in second gear, just a couple of double Bloody Marys on an empty stomach.

Now he's a combination of the southern gentleman, the fey, absent-minded professor, the brilliant observer of today's mores. Top this off with a tincture of his inimitable weirdness, and he's a lovable guy. His following is devoted.

After dinner we start back up the mountain. Maria driving, thank God. The front entrance to the house leads into the living room. It's a place to hibernate, big comfortable couches and a huge open fireplace.

Lining the top of the room is an array of hats, maybe 30 of them—Borsalinos, fedoras. Panamas, cowboy hats, and more hats—a hat collection, a common fetish for guys with sparse hair.

The kitchen is an all-purpose room with all the cooking equipment on one side. On the other side is a standup piano. Books are all over the place. The walls are festooned with photos, handbills, and the knickknacks a traveling man with a sense of humor accumulates.

Hunter points out his communication center, a big television set and stereo setup. He has a large satellite dish outside for reception. "How about this?" he says, patting a bulky piece of equipment, a telefax machine. "I just stick the copy for my column in here and it's reproduced at the paper in San Francisco, over the phone line."

"That saves a lot of time and bother, doesn't it?"

He gives the machine a punch. "I don't know. I still haven't figured out how to get the goddamned

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## DOUG BE FRESH

He sputters, he pops, he thumps, he rings. He doesn't sound like drums; he sounds like a drum machine. "I had to develop my thing on the street, where your ideas get stolen," says Doug E. Fresh. His thing made "The Show" last year's top rap single.

PHOTO BY JOHN LEIBMAN

**Y**o, Bam, you got a roll on here that's a motherucker!" Audition night at Tommy Boy Records. Doug E. Fresh is on the scene as a judge, but right now he's mesmerized by the latest single by fellow celebrity-judge Afrika Bambaataa, which is on the turntable.

"I gotta hear that roll!" shouts Doug. Bambaataa just smiles, adjusts the brown towel that hangs around his

neck, and cradles a video camera on his shoulder as Doug plays the roll again and again.

"I gotta hear that roll!" shouts Doug.

"Damn!"

The auditioning groups, stuffed into a crowded stairway for the last half hour, are anxious to get on with it. But no one says a word. Doug E. Fresh works

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Above: (L-R) Doug E. Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew, DJ Chill Will and Slick Rick.

the tonearm one more time. So everyone waits, because Doug E. Fresh has juice. At 19, he is sitting on one of the biggest and looziest records in the history of rap and has succeeded in pushing himself to the head of the rap pack. After being rejected by an embarrassing number of top rap labels, "The Show" and its flip side, "La-Di-Da-Di," have sold well over half a million copies in the United States. Thanks to home taping and the double-deck box, "La-Di-Da-Di" was New York's hottest track before it was even pressed on vinyl. Doug E. Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew appeared on England's *Top of the Pops*; "The Show," treated there as a pop record, went Top 5 in England and became the best-selling rap single ever in Europe.

The record is a perverse phenomenon. People who don't like rap like it; people who like rap love it. In its own sly way, it mocks the whole conceit of macho posturing that is at the core of hip hop. "The Show" and "La-Di-Da-Di" aren't about epic sexual prowess or basic training in the ghetto; they're about sexual vulnerability. Doug and his sidekick, the nasal MC Slick Rick (Walters), slip in and out of female characterizations, most of whom are more physical and aggressive than the males. "La-Di-Da-Di" begins with a long, sumptuous description of Rick's morning toilette: nail file, Oil of Olay, bubble bath, baby powder (can you imagine Run-D.M.C. talking about their baby powder?), cologne, Gucci underwear. After admiring his pretty self in the mirror, he heads out for the street—where he becomes an innocent but cute lamb in the sexual jungle, eluding wolfish women, women so rugged that mothers deck their own daughters to get to him. In "The Show," he sits next to a woman on the subway, only to find that she's "Tony the Tiger." In both songs, Rick is the pursued, not the pursuer, a passive sex object who always manages to avoid sex. It's a fantasy based on role reversal: these guys are tired of being the horny hunters. The sensitive man comes to rap.

Every kid lined up to audition at Tommy Boy thinks he has the stuff to repeat Doug's success. But if Doug (real last name: Davis) wants to hear two seconds of "Funk You" one more time, they'll wait.

"That is a motherfucker!"

But enough of this. The pros move over to let the youngbloods strut their stuff. Bambataa blinks them with the spotlight on his video camera, and Doug nonchalantly beats them to their rhymes. Not so they can hear him, but loud enough to entertain the rest of us in the gallery. "Beat," he says, a second ahead of an unsuspecting upstart, "Street."

The hopeful—dusted, straight, nervous, in Gucci T-shirts, black silk capes and top hats—look to Doug for approval.

"Doug E. Fresh, you're my man!" hollers a pumped-up Unknown Rapper with a paper bag over his head. "You know why? Because you told me what to do and I did it."

"Word up?" says Doug.

"Word up. Donchu remember?"

"Uh, refresh my memory," says Doug.

The Unknown Rapper names a street corner in upper Manhattan. Doug musters a tentative gesture of acknowledgment, then shows clear signs of relief as the Rapper wanders off to look for a bathroom. Bambataa, ignored by this new generation, captures the scene on videotape.

"Six minutes . . . six minutes . . . six minutes Doug E. Fresh you're on."

As the most promising acts complete their encores, Doug walks to the center of the room to address the lot. He stands a lean 6'1" or so, from Jeri curls to Reeboks. His tan leather bomber jacket is snapped high under his chin, and an arc of pinkish scar tissue sets off his bottomless brown eyes.

"I wish I had something like this when I was starting," he says in a sad sack voice. "I had to develop my thing on the street, where your ideas get stolen. What you all doing is fly. But the most important thing is: stay in school and make your mom happy."

When he mentions ideas getting stolen, a couple

of eyes look up self-consciously. At the Tommy Boy auditions, there are no mikes, no turntables for scratching. Some groups put backup music or beats on tape. But most go cold. To set a pulse, one member of the group blows Bronx cheers, lip farts, and lip pops into his fist to the beat. Doug E. Fresh was the first to create sounds this way. He says that a couple of years ago the Fat Boys stole his sounds and recorded a version of this technique on their single "Human Beat Box." A few months later, Doug released his own righteously indignant first single, "The Original Human Beat Box."

Doug E. Fresh is the new technology. Using lips, teeth, gums, tongue, cheeks, and Adam's apple, he simulates electronic reproductions of human sounds. He doesn't sound like drums; he sounds like a *drum machine*. He can ring like a telephone, thud like a tom-tom, or snap like a claptrap. Video game sounds shoot out from the sides of his neck. He challenges his DJs, Chill Will and Barry B, to match beats with him. Like the old sideshow entertainers who kept time with spoons or by slapping their thighs, he turns the beat into a poor man's circus. When he rocks a beat



Chase Rose

live, his audience erupts like he just went into "Stairway to Heaven."

In the West Harlem townhouse apartment that he shares with his mother and his younger brother, Doug is laying out his dry cleaning (white Fila warm-up suit). Here, he is another person, dropping his guard in favor of a shy, earnest evasiveness. He couldn't be less comfortable if I were a cop. "What do you like about rap music?" he asks. When I answer and put the question back to him, he says, "Same."

He doesn't try to impress me. There's nothing gaudy about his dress or speech, no element of the performance to his conversation. But ego does abound. Slick Rick isn't here. The group's manager, Dennis Bell, says Rick doesn't like to do interviews, which may not be the explanation. Doug presents the group as his group. Even though Rick is the crowd favorite, in concert Doug comes out alone with the two DJs. Rick doesn't join them until halfway through the set. Doug doesn't exactly condescend to him, bandleader to sideman, but neither does he give Rick equal credit for their success. Ask him what's so special about the

crew, and he'll tell you about the beat box.

"I been doing this for a long time," he says. "Ever since elementary school. Music always been the thing. I used to like Elvis Presley, too, know what I'm saying? Jackson Five was cool, but they wasn't my . . . that would be basically what most rap groups would listen to. But I was, like, into Elton John, Bob Marley. I was into, like, rock music. I used to bang on tables in the classroom and rap, and I used to hold the attention of the whole class. And I was doing the beat box then."

"I think he [Darren "Human Beat Box" Robinson of the Fat Boys] heard me do it. I was mad at them, because they took an idea and concept that I came up with, and they tried to make people believe that they invented it. That would get anybody mad. But you know, I just looked at it and said, 'It's a small thing to a giant. And persistence overcomes resistance.'"

Phrases like this repeatedly pop up in Doug's conversation. He's on his way, pushing it to the top. A self-made man at 19, he has written his autobiography as Horatio Alger: he was working so hard, he was about to bust out—even if he hadn't met Slick Rick. He's an odd combination of religious humility and the self-righteous confidence that comes with success. One minute he talks about being ripped off, the next he wishes the thieves well. He hasn't seen a royalty check from "The Show" yet and he has cut back on live shows to work on his upcoming album, so success hasn't changed his life materially yet. He discusses it aphoristically, referring to making people happy and building up the rap empire; at the same time, he talks about going for it on his own.

Platitudes aside, all of the beat box chops in Doug's arsenal didn't make his first single a hit. Before he teamed up with Slick Rick, Doug was trapped in a standard hip hop style. For "The Show" and "La-Di-Da-Di," the two came up with something totally different. It doesn't even sound like a hip hop record. It sounds like two guys fooling around with raps when nobody's listening. In the middle of "The Show," Rick breaks into an a cappella, out-of-tune rendition of "Michelle."

"It was a different style of rapping," says Doug. "There was singing in there to show how close singing and rap is to each other, and it showed you how one could just go into the other. It was just something out of the ordinary."

So out of the ordinary that the first labels he offered it to passed on it. ("I didn't hear it," one penitent label prez told me. "I didn't deserve it.")

"They're not in the street, they don't know what the people like," says Doug. "They feel they know it all, but they don't. I live out here and I get around the streets and I know what they like. They should get somebody representing the street if they're trying to get involved with this music."

"It's like me tryna push a opera record around here. You can't. I'd have to bring in somebody that know how to sell a opera record. If you asked me how to sell a rap record, then I can give you all the information."

**E**arly this year, the Get Fresh Crew went back to the box to create another hit, a racy Slick Rick rap called "Treat Her Like a Prostitute":

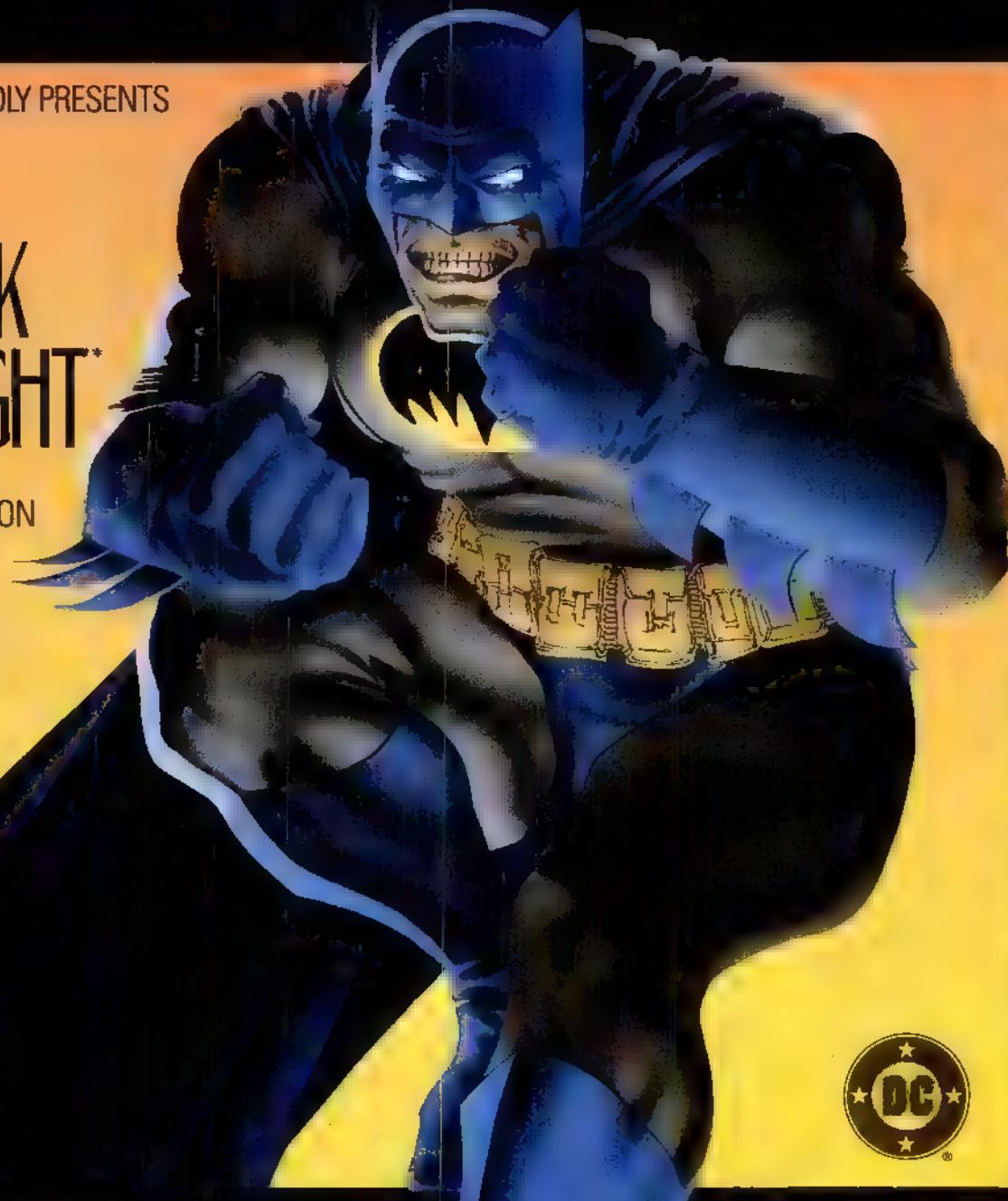
*She takes off your drawers and she works you over  
She calls you Twinkles and you call her Rover  
Next thing you know she starts to ill  
She says "I love you, Harold" and your name is Phil  
But that's not the half as you start to ride her  
You take off your rubber, but there's one more inside her*

Despite great demand on the street, "Prostitute" will probably never be released. Something about behaving responsibly toward his younger audience, Dennis Bell tells me. This from the folks who recorded, "And with your wrinkled pussy I can't be your lover," and made a hit.

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But girls love Rick. Most rappers don't play to their female audience; they're sexy because they're cooler than the other guys, and the prize for coolness is the women. Rick is cool because he's preened, cute, and untouchable. In the fantasy he shares with the audience, the women battle over him. They play aggressor. Run-D.M.C. are studs with a 30-day guarantee; Rick is a tease stoking young girls' libidos.

In "Treat Her Like a Prostitute," however, he's caught, and paying for it. I confront Doug about this new shade of sexism. He squirms. "What's mean?" he asks. "Well," he admits, "that's true to a certain extent. At the same time, you can look at it like this: women degrade men, and men degrade women, and jokin' is jokin'. A joke is a joke. And you can look at it to be the truth, or you can look at it to not mean anything."

I can't, so I try to get a line on Doug's own sexual life. Does he have a girlfriend? "No way," he says, "I don't have time." If I probe any deeper, he says, he'll lie to me. "You never know who might read this article."

You can't blame him for squirming. After all, the lyrics to "Prostitute" are really Rick's lines. Doug raps about the beat box and how he started the group. If Rick is the crew's flashy, profane side, Doug is its hidden, sacred one.

"The Show," says Doug, "was designed to get the point across about God. That's why throughout the whole record, there's that 'oh my God, oh my God.' And there was a section in it that said 'six minutes.' And people started saying that line. Three sixes is the sign of the Devil. But at the end of it all, everybody said 'oh my God' more than they said that. And that was showing the power of God over this. And 'is it real' said real fast is Israel. But it was done like in your mind, and you don't really recognize it."

**"They feel they know it all, but they don't," says Doug of record companies. "They should get somebody representing the street if they're trying to get involved with this music."**

"This is a gift," says Doug, "for a person to be able to sit back and think of things and draw the attention of the whole population and just make them feel good. It's a gift and it only happens to those that can handle that type of responsibility. I don't indulge in no type of get high. I don't drink, don't smoke, don't sniff. I don't even eat meat. The only thing I do is hang out sometimes."

"I like to give off a positive image for the younger generation, instead of just being somebody that made a few records, and then you see me in the street getting high. That's not my style. And I don't think it'll ever be, even if everything was to stop today. Because even though you think people don't look at you no more, they still do. As long as God permits me to do what I'm doing, and as long as I feel that I'm not taking

the type of responsibility that I got and using it in a negative way, I feel like I should never have to really peak down. Unless I do it to myself. Certain people peak down at certain times because it's time for new things to grow. Just like a flower or something: the way it's up and it's alive and it's pretty, but after a while it has to die. And just like you gotta die and I gotta die, that's the same thing with popularity. It'll have to come down one day. But mine'll be a long time from now. Because I'm here to get a point across."

**C**ut back to the night before, at the Tommy Boy audition. The contestants hover around the judges, trying to sneak a peak at their notes. They're 15, 16; some of them are 12. They can't sing and can't play an instrument, but they expect to get a record contract and make it big, like Doug. They don't need a corporate hype machine, a massive recording budget, or even an album's worth of material. All they need is a shot. And even though Doug E. Fresh has already scored on his, as he waits for that first royalty check, he's still one of them.

"I want to take it beyond what everybody thought it would go," he tells me. "I want to show people exactly how much creativity you can have by not studying no music—I mean, getting, of course, a high school diploma—but not studying no music, not taking no lessons and all this other stuff, and just doing everything on feelings alone. Just say what you want to say, and feel what you want to feel, and create a music that everybody thought would not make it. Everybody looked at this music as a passing fad. We just played Madison Square Garden. And sold out. It can't be that much of a passing fad."

The Unknown Rapper returns and presses the skin with Doug E. Fresh. Then he looks around to see if anyone noticed, and glides out. On wings.

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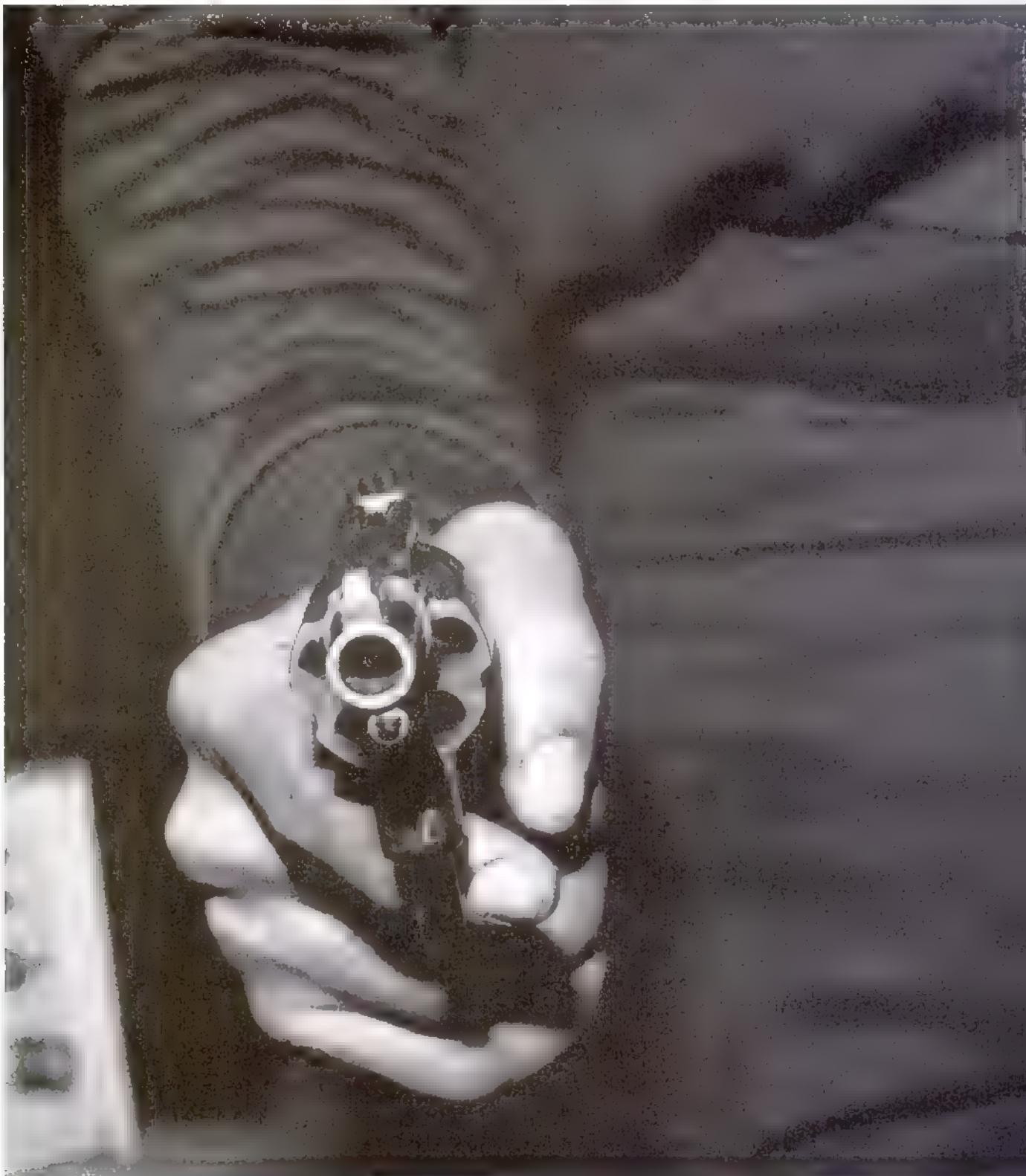
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# IN COLD BLOOD

When young kids are allowed to own guns and use them, terrifying violence reigns and makes victims of everyone. An exposé of the Baltimore teen murders.

Article by Barry Michael Cooper

Photography by Robin Graubard

**G**od Almighty, you can get killed in Baltimore—for no reason at all. Say that to yourself a few times. Gargle it, and choke on the terror. If you look at a kid too long, or the wrong way, you could get killed. For no reason at all. If you bump into a kid on the street, even if you only lightly brush up against him, and even if you apologize, it could be the last thing you ever do.

In Baltimore, 14- and 15-year-old boys are killing each other on rundown basketball courts, in high school gyms, in poolrooms, on row-house porches, in garbage-strewn back alleys. In the last 14 months there have been almost 20 murders of young kids by other kids.



Baltimore is known in the tourist trade as Charm City. But do not come down here looking for charm right now, and whatever you do, don't disrespect the killer children on the corners.

The media in Baltimore have hardly covered this story. True, the TV news reports the murders, but it does so statistically, dispassionately, on its way to the weather; the newscasters appear numbed by it all. Black congressional leaders, pastors, and concerned citizens address the problem by generalizing it and in a sense dismissing it as a black-on-black crime situation, by making defensive comparisons to other cities' crime rates, by covering up, and sometimes by lying.

The Atlanta child murders were a horror—someone was out there kidnapping and killing young kids. But with one arrest, it was over. Here, in Baltimore, the killing never ends. It goes on, a reign of terror. Over the past few months, much of my time has been spent watching these kids. Moving from club to club, hanging out on street corners, I've met the killers, and sadly, I think I've also met kids who will most likely be victims.

How do I describe for you the real terror, the real horror of all this? Is it by reams of graphic police reports? Do you need to see block upon block of bloodstained sidewalks, curbs, and stoops? Should I tell you about the mothers who wake up in the middle of the night, hearing what they imagine are the screams of their children being shot down in the

street? Or on a playground?

When I began several months ago, it was because with a bizarre regularity, I heard the reports of more and more killings. When I began, I heard, saw, and experienced things that I will never be able to overcome. And maybe because of that, and maybe because I needed to understand what was going on, I went out into the streets to meet the Yo-boys, the young killers.

**O**n a Saturday afternoon there are 10 of them on the northeastern corner of Pulaski and North. Their walk is a cross between a hard looping bop and a crippled pigeon's wobble. When they stand still, they hunch their shoulders and karate-chop the ice-cold air with dramatic gestures that underline the fearlessness they want to portray. They're dressed in low-cut black Fila sneakers with two white-red lines around the sole, sweat suits in black, white, red, green—hard, sharp tones that complement the night, that flash warning signals—and oversized coats and hunting parkas with big pockets on the chest and at the waist that hold bullets, when necessary. On the insides are even larger pockets—"gun pockets"—that can hold several handguns at once, even an Uzi.

They move like vultures on the corner, in a circular death pattern, waiting for something to happen. The thick gold chains around their necks

Rap music is the voice of kids in Baltimore; it's gangster politiks by way of two turntables and a microphone.

signal success, but at the same time weigh them down. They're the dogs of war. Sitting through a Saturday-night movie marathon, they want to live twisted interpretations of Al Pacino's Scarface and Schwarzenegger's Terminator. In the balcony of the dilapidated Hippodrome Theater, absorbed in the moving shadows on the screen, sniffing \$20 caps of "cane" (cocaine) to bring the images to life, their visions are of blood lust—\$5 boys looking for million-dollar manhood in the barrel of a gun. Their dreams are to have it all, like Scarface Montana—"The world and everything in it," y'aw—even if it means going down, kicking it live, in a barrage of gunfire. These are the Yo boys.

**T**he situation here reminds me of the Harlem I grew up in during the early '70s. King Heroin reigned then. You had to worry about junkies walking up behind you and sticking a gun in your back. It was the era of the street gang: the Black Spades, Savage Skulls, the Glory Stompers. If you weren't in any of those, you found alternative routes home from school, stayed upstairs on weekends and read Iceberg Slim and

Richard Wright, and danced to James Brown and B.T. Express, but you didn't go outside. Those years also birthed the dopeboys, kids who came to school with Elliot Ness shoulder holsters, "strapped," as we used to say, packing trey-five-sevens under \$400 cashmere Cortefial coats. You felt the fear in Harlem, but you knew the knuckleheads would examine all options before pulling the trigger.

Baltimore is different. There are no options to weigh. I want mine, I want it now, and I'll get it any way possible. The boys here live from a whisper to a scream, no middle ground, no gray. Just pull the trigger. And keep on stroking.

North Avenue, the heart of black Baltimore, is a horizontal stretch of ghetto, rubberbanding from east to west. It's not a harsh layout. There are a few sections of burned-out, abandoned buildings that look like postwar Berlin, but some of the tan, red, and blue row houses look like Japanese watercolors, soft city pastels. Still, you get a sense from the people that something is missing here, as if the empty rhetoric and fallen heroes of the civil-righteous '60s sucker-punched them silly. On every other block are the obligatory bar-liquor-drugstore combos—which double as dream factories where you can float on a sea of booze and million-dollar lottery fantasies—laundromats, and Korean greasy spoons, known as carryouts. Cheesesteaks, cheesecakes, crab cakes, french fries; some of the foreigners behind the Plexiglas walls can barely pronounce the menu, let alone understand many of the orders, but as long as the kids are hustling on the corners, the carryouts will be open. Twenty-four hours.

Sun Carryout, on Pulaski and North Avenue, is crowded this Friday night, as usual. The odd, lyrical strains of Korean opera are suspended near the ceiling, counterpointing the popping grease from the grill and the conversation below.

"Hey, y'aw, gimme a four-piece wing-ding."

"Hot saw, ketchuh, sall-peppuh?" asks the blank-faced little man behind the plastic shield.

"Yeah, all that," mouths the kid in the burgundy acrylic parka. He nudges his partner and goes back to their conversation.

"We don't have to double-team him, y'aw. I got my shit on me. I'm gonna shoot him in his fuckin' head."

Both boys look to be about 13 years old, but I am not surprised. This is one of the hottest corners in the city. I order some french fries, and then I spot Tommy Wilson. Tommy manages the laundromat across the street, giving out change, bleach, and soap powder and sweeping up after closing. He's an intelligent, honest, hardworking 22-year-old. I treat him to some fries and a Coke. It is unusually warm—almost 60 degrees—so we go outside to talk.

"A lot of people think a Yo is a rapper," he says, "or has something to do with rap music. It's not about that. Yo is a code word for a young drug dealer. When you want to buy some 'get high,' you just go on the corner and ask, 'What you got, y'aw?' or 'You got that stuff, y'aw?' They sell their drugs in vitamin capsules you can buy in any health-food store.

"You can always spot a Yo. Anytime you see a 15- or 16-year-old boy, like them kids over there"—Tommy points across the street to a swarm of kids lined up in front of Cyrus Israel's Dayland Records, a video/poolroom—"wearin' two and three 'Mr. T' solid gold chains around their necks—and them chains go for no less than \$1,500 apiece—you know them boys is sellin'. Anytime you see a boy on a Honda scooter, he's probably sellin', and his supplier bought him the scooter to transport his merchandise. Some of the older Yos, around 18, 19, drive Mazdas, Cressidas, and Maximas.

"A lot of these boys are addicts themselves. You don't have to sell drugs to make money; some boys become 'testers,' and rent out their arms and noses

## "We don't have to double-team him," I hear one kid tell another at the takeout stand. "I got my shit on me. I'm gonna shoot him in his fuckin' head."

to sell product, especially heroin. But that's dangerous, because if the heroin is too potent, or if a dealer is using rat poison, then it's all over. The boys who use their own product are the ones to watch out for. They are the type who spend all their money on drugs, using product, buying more product, and when they don't have enough for clothes or whatever, they'll go out and kill somebody, and take what they need.

"About three months ago, two boys tried to take me off, right on this corner. It was about 1 in the mornin' and I was comin' from this girl's house. I had on this brand-new leather coat, which cost me \$300. Then these two big boys"—Tommy is about 5'4"—"both of them was over 6 feet and 200 pounds, walked up on me. They looked young, maybe 16, and they had the big 'dukey'" referring to the size of the links on a chain, which look like steel—"rope chains. I knew what was up. One boy stood in front of me, the other went behind me. The boy in front had real puffy hands, like balloons, and I knew he was an addict. He told me, 'Gimme your coat.' I said, 'You gonna have to kill me and take it.' I always carry a .22 on me when I'm out late like that. Not that I'm tryin' to be a gangster or nothin', but I work too hard for people to be takin' my stuff. So when this boy made his move, I pointed my coat pocket at his chest and shot him twice, right through the coat pocket. When he dropped, I swung around and shot his boy in the leg once, and he went down screaming. I started to run, but this police car rolled up behind me. Ain't that a bitch? They had seen the whole thing, but they didn't try to stop it. I guess they like to see us killing each other.

"The first boy I shot admitted to the cops that he was trying to rob me. He only did that because he thought he was gonna die that night, one of the cops told me later. The charges have been dropped."

Tommy says it's easy to get a gun, as simple as going to any corner and asking for it.

"I could go down the street right now," he says, "and get almost any kind of gun I want. A .22 will run you no more than \$30. A .357 or a .38 automatic, no more than \$75. Nine-millimeters and Uzis go for about \$130."

I ask him what the parents have to say about their kids selling drugs and killing people.

"You might not believe this," he says with a half-smirk, "but some of the parents are in on what their kids are doing. A lot of boys come from welfare families, and the parents let the boys sell drugs to fill in for the time the check money is not around. The money is good, up to \$300 a day, maybe more. The parents even hook up a special room for the customers and show their kids special knocks on the door to tell the difference between customers and neighbors.

"I know a girl on Division Street whose family got busted in a surprise raid—everybody in her family was selling or helping her two brothers, who are 15 and 18—because the family across the street set them up. They were jealous of all their customers, and they didn't have any business."

It is 1:30 AM, and Tommy and I are standing outside of the carryout watching a group of boys outside of Cyrus Israel's doing a real cool shimmy-and-shake to the gunshot funk of Schoolly-D's "P.S.K." I notice a mountain of a teenager, standing by himself on the corner. He's about 6'4" and can't weigh less than 230 pounds of pure muscle. He is aloof, guarded, unaffected by the music, danger, or life itself. *I exist, therefore I am.* He is dressed in a black leather jacket, black hooded sweat suit, and black Filas, and he is holding a long white flower box.

"Who is that?" I ask.

"He owns Pulaski," says Tommy. "The boy don't play, neither. He has killed seven or eight people and ain't been caught yet. Don't mess with him, he's

Pulaski Street near North Avenue, one of the favorite corners of the Yo boys.





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| <b>XTRA</b> 91 San Diego, CA       | <b>WHMH</b> 101.7 St. Cloud, MN           | <b>KJET-AM</b> 1950 Seattle, WA           |
| <b>KXFM</b> 99.1 Santa Maria, CA   | <b>WHTG</b> 106.3 Asbury Park, NJ         | <b>WQFM</b> 93.3 Milwaukee, WI            |
| <b>KTCL</b> 93.3 Fort Collins, CO  | <b>WPRB</b> 103.3 Princeton, NJ           | <b>WTCS-AM</b> 1490 Fairmont, WV          |
| <b>WYBC</b> 94.3 New Haven, CT     | <b>KOZZ</b> 105.7 Reno, NV                | <b>KLWD</b> 96.5 Sheridan, WY             |
| <b>WRUF</b> 103.7 Gainesville, FL  | <b>WLIR</b> 92.7 Hempstead, NY            | <b>WVIS</b> 106.1 Frederiksted, St. Croix |
| <b>WMNF</b> 88.5 Tampa, FL         | <b>ACRN</b> 99.3 Athens, OH               | Radio Caroline, Europe                    |
| <b>KBLE</b> 90.7 Des Moines, IA    | <b>WOXY</b> 97.7 Cincinnati, OH           | Radio Magyar, Budapest, Hungary           |
| <b>KFMH</b> 99.7 Muscatine, IA     | <b>WMGZ</b> 95.9 Youngstown, OH           |   |

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**"I always carry my .22 in my pocket," says Tommy. "So when these kids tried to take me off, I just pointed my coat pocket at one of them and fired into his chest."**

the man. He'll take you out in a minute. That's FTD."

... P is for the people  
Who can't understand  
How one homeboy became a man  
S is for the way  
You scream and shout  
One by one  
I'm knocking you out . . .  
—Schooly-D, "P.S.K.—What Does It Mean?"

The 8 PM sun settles easy behind Douglass High School, slower than a red-ball jet, faster than a puff of rosy smoke from a Chinese cherry bomb. Jogging on the school's running track in mid-August is an uphill battle against sticky sweat, choking heat, and terrorist gnats, but the rings of fat hula-hooping my waist force me to fight back. It's my 31st time around, and just one more lap—that elusive eighth mile—will be my last. At the halfway point, I notice three boys, no older than 15, rattling the wobbly fence surrounding the track and football field, like caged, chubby, pimple-faced adolescent animals trying to escape their own fears, anxiety, boredom. Deep down I can sense that they want to jeer, to try, to test me. Chump the sweaty, out-of-breath sucker's hand, push his buttons, and see if the jack-in-the-hot-box pops up with any static. Just because he's big don't mean he can fight. Homedeeding is probably a toy. Let's wind him up, y'all.

"Hey-hey-hey/It's F-a-a-a-t Albert/And I'm gonna lose some weight too-day-hay . . ." the "fatboys" sing in unison. I try to ignore them, but they keep it up. A crowd starts to gather from the bus stop nearby. My ignorance and ego take over. I run over to the fence, and we trade a few choice words. Slowly the boys back away from the fence. Sensing the worst, the crowd begins to dissolve.

"Hey, stay right there, Fat Albert, if you think you so bad!" says one of the boys as they walk away. "I'm gonna go home and get my shit, OK? So wait there, OK?"

My heart races and my temples throb. I know that this kid, barely out of childhood, is talking about getting his gun. Shaken and dizzy, I try to finish the lap, but instead, I run upstairs and off the track, all the way to my house.

Later that night, I hear on the 11 o'clock news that there were two more murders on Pulaski and North avenues a few blocks from where I'd been running. The victims are black boys, 16 and 17. There are no suspects, but police have a description of a young black, between 15 and 16. I turn off the TV, and the room shrinks into silent darkness.

. . . Went to the bathroom  
To wash up  
Put some soap on my face  
And put my hand on a cup  
I said "Mirror mirror  
On the wall  
Who is the top choice of them all?"  
There was a rubble-dubble  
Five minutes it lasted  
The mirror said  
"You are, you conceited bastid" . . .



Rap club 4604 is a temple of sex and stimulation, the pleasure dome, where the music leads kids around like bulldogs on a leash.

The Yo boys are standing in front of Cyrus Israel's video parlor. Israel, a handsome man of medium height with salt-and-pepper hair and a sandalwood complexion, doesn't allow them to sell drugs inside, so the Yos congregate in front of the store's gunmetal-gray doors. For months I have been anxious to go inside and look around, but I needed someone to watch my back in case something happened. I had offered to pay two older guys who had grown up on the streets and who were weekend "horse heads" (heroin sniffers) to go in with me, but, perhaps out of fear, they never showed up when it was time to meet.

Around 5 one afternoon I decide to go in alone. The place is dotted with a few boys playing video games. As I hit the door, one boy eyes me coldly, all the while chalking his cue at the pool table. The room is small, and the stench of incense pulls the walls closer together. There is a long, rectangular slice of mirror on one of the paneled walls, thrown at a crazy slant that gives the place the off-balance feel of a carnival fun house. The guitar, slurred

northern drawl of the boys on the video machines captures my attention. They talk strange in Baltimore: "Ay, Larb-ee (Larry), why you tryin' to dug (dog) me, boo-ee (boy)? Watchu tryin' to dew, y'aw?"

It is time to make my move to talk to these Yos, get inside their world.

"Hey," I tough in a voice I hope won't break into falsetto, "you know a girl named Lee-Lee?" I proceed to describe this fictional character. "She owes me some money." As I approach the pool player—this 15-year-old kid with the eyes of a mako shark—his attitude says, "Back off!"

"No, I ain't seen her. Never heard a' no Lee-Lee."

"OK, thanks, cheese."

I start to turn my back to leave, but this kid is looking at me so hard that that might be foolish. So I back out of the door slowly.

A few days later, SPIN photographer Robin Graubard arrives to take pictures. She wants to take shots at night. So we hire a cab and tell the driver, "North and Pulaski."

"I don't know," the driver hesitates, gripping the steering wheel more tightly. "I don't know about this. You know, a black man, a white woman with a camera, taking pictures in a cab at night."

The cab cruises down Pulaski while Robin adjusts the flash, seemingly impervious to the real and present danger around us. We come to the hot corner and Robin says, "Could you like, uh, slow down some more? Like, to a crawl?"

It's starting to get scary. And the driver is the first to sense it. "They pay people, spotters, to look out for snoops and things like this!" he says. "They can take the number on this cab and have me killed!"

"Like, nobody is thinking about taking your number," says Robin.

"How would you know?" I explode. "You're gonna check out Amtrak in a few hours. You don't have to live here. Hey, we could get killed!"

"Nobody is gonna get killed!" she counters.

"Hey, driver, forget it, this is crazy."

"No! Don't forget it, I've got a job to do! Let's do it!" protests Robin. This is happening as we ride down Pulaski. Robin places her lens on the ledge of the car window and aims. FLASH! FLASH! The camera lights up the corner like an instant sunrise.

"Hey! What the fuck you doin'!" comes a curdling scream from the corner.

"Man, that was nothin', that was nothin'," Robin grumbles. "I gotta do it again. Could you, like, almost not move at all? Can you understand that?"

"Can you understand that this is some wild shit?" I scream. "Please, driver," I say reluctantly, "go around once more. I promise, it's the last time."

The driver grits his teeth. "I got a family, you know? I don't wanna die tonight!"

"Me neither," I say.

We go around again. Robin aims. FLASH! FLASH!

"Hey, bitch," yells the same kid. "If you take another picture, I'm gonna shoot you!"

We take off.

Later, halfwitted and bathing in the eerie glow of my TV set, I hear what I don't need to hear. There was another killing. Two kids, between 17 and 18 years old, were shot on the steps of a house on Ettings Street, a few blocks from where we were tonight. I turn off the set and stare into the darkness. It just wasn't our time yet. But it was close enough.

I should shoot you dead . . .  
P.S.K., we're makin' that green  
People always say  
What the hell does that mean . . .

You might be a narkah. Maybe we shouldn't be talkin' to you, right, y'aw?"

The six teenage boys in the Lakewood Community Center gym scrutinize me thoroughly, as if I am fuzzy bacteria under a cheap grade-school microscope. Clad in cut-off sweatpants and faded green intramural tournament shirts, perspiring heavily after a rigorous practice, they shift uneasily in their seats. A worn leather ball smacks and boomerangs off the sandy tiles around us. I tell "Lil' Anthony"—a 5-foot 12-year-old with a devastating jump shot—that if I were an undercover cop, or "narkah," I wouldn't have given them my real name, nor would I have asked them to use aliases.

I had come to the center at night to get a handle on the mindset of Baltimore's black teenage male and his need to carry a gun. Why was it necessary for black politicos and clergy to institute a "Stop the Killings" campaign, a point driven home by a bumper-sticker slogan: "Us Killing Us = Genocide."

Some of the killings, the boys say, are drug-related. Usually, when a kid is trying to sell on another kid's corner, he will die. Or if a kid is abusing the supply of heroin or cocaine he is selling, the older supplier will hire another boy, preferably 15 or younger, to kill him. If the shooter is caught, eight times out of 10 he won't be tried as an adult, but will be sent off to some juvenile facility. The dealer keeps his hands clean and his productivity rolling. Also, if a kid is selling bad drugs, substituting Isotol or Midol—used to relieve menstrual cramps—for real cocaine, or rat poison for heroin, he is asking for a funeral.

The other murders are the status killings; murder brings you big respect on the street.

"You're the man when you kill somebody," says Harrison, a tall and lanky boy who is the de facto leader of this group. "About a year ago, at the Madison Park apartments, a boy named Larry Watkins bumped into another boy named Teddy Rogers, and Teddy had a friend with him. Teddy's friend said, 'Don't let none of these little punks ever disrespect you! And then Teddy pulled out a gun, shot Larry, and killed him.'

One of the popular rap anthems here is "Rock the Bells," by LL Cool J—an icon in Baltimore—whose lyrics include, ". . . you bring the woodpecker, I'll bring the wood . . ." "Woodpecker" being idolator and copycat, "wood," or penis, representing the totality of male teenager, personality and emotion. On the streets in Baltimore, manhood is realized as

## Rap music owns the kids in Baltimore. When Schoolly-D sings, "Put my pistol to your head . . . I should shoot you dead," he validates the actions of the trigger-happy teen.

much by knocking out a human life as it is by knocking up a 14-year-old girl, which is another part of the problem: babies making babies, babies raising babies.

In 1985, Baltimore led the nation in teenage pregnancies, with a whopping 3,000. Most of the teens committing the murders have parents barely 14 or 15 years older than they are. Many of their parents lack employment, direction, and guidance themselves. They are links in an unbroken, two- and three-generation chain of welfare dependency. I remember a scene I saw one day while waiting for the bus downtown. On one of the coldest days in February, 21 degrees, with a wind chill of 6 or 7, a pudgy, chestnut-brown girl, no older than 17, arrived at the bus stop bundled in a three-quarter black-fox coat with matching hat and black leather pants. Cradled in her arms was a newborn, swathed in a pink goose-down blanket. Wailing at her side was a 3-year-old boy, dressed in a thin, raggedy coat, mittens with holes in them, and earmuffs. She sat on the bus stop bench, trying futilely to block the ripping wind from the bawling child. Finally she screamed, "Shut the fuck up, you little bastid!" "But Mommy, I'm cold, I'm cold," he moaned. She cursed at him again and again. I guess she didn't know anything about computers—garbage in, garbage out—because every time he whined, she cursed. The kid threw a tantrum and turned on a spigot near the steps of a row house. As we started to board the bus, she shouted at the boy, "Get on, the fuckin' bus." I couldn't help wondering if the nearly frostbitten toddler would develop a trigger finger in 12 years.

**T**he accessibility of guns on the street is frightening. "I know a lot of young boys," continues the tall, lanky kid, "like around 15, 16, who carry heavy firepower. Like Uzis. I know a man around my block who tries to sell .45s, M.A.C. 10s, M-16s, and German Lugers. He don't mess with no six-shooters, just automatic guns. And the young boys on the corners are buying them."

When I try to find out what the kids on the street hold sacred, what is important to them besides selling drugs and killing, I don't learn much. Clothes are important; Harrison and another boy proudly display \$105 Fila basketball shoes, shoes that some kids are getting killed for. All say they love rap music with a passion, because of the beat. LL Cool J is everyone's favorite. Last December—and there is a lot of disagreement between Harrison and the fellas as to what actually happened—during a show at a Baltimore theater, LL reportedly decided to get theatrical. He supposedly pointed to a kid and his girl in the huge crowd and sang, "I'm rhymin' and designin' with your girl on my lap." Reportedly, the kid pulled out a gun and began shooting at LL. This triggered a stampede. Smiley disagrees and says LL never went onstage, because the guy started shooting before the show. As the boys argue, I remember a newscast the night of Christmas Eve, which reported a girl getting shot in the arm and someone getting trampled after a rap concert at a club called 4604. I decide to check out 4604 late tonight. It is 7 PM, and I go home to take a short nap before hitting the streets.

Hunzz!! Hunzz-hunzz!!

Somebody is trying to push my doorbell straight through the living room. "Who is it?" I ask, groggy and a little angry.

"Open the door, y'aw."

"I said, who is it?"

"It's Jehovah Witness, y'aw."

"Hey, cheese," I say, "Michael Jackson is in Encino. You're about 2,000 miles off course."

"Open the door, y'aw." The voice is cold.

Before I have a chance to think, a burst of ammo blows the door off the hinges. The bullets cut me apart, like little white-hot knives; blood gushes everywhere, blasting out of the Swiss-cheese holes in my body like crimson geysers. The three fatboys from the park brandish splitting Uzis. I fold like a Slinky to the ground.

I wake from the nightmare drenched in sweat. I have second thoughts about going out, but eventually decide I'll go.

Rap music owns the kids in Baltimore; the thump of the drum computer has them locked in a psychological vise. All of the major radio stations are forced to play rap, even though it conflicts with their mainstream formats. Rap pours out of the boom boxes, out of the cars, out of the mouths of the kids and into the streets like a flood, a tidal wave of power. The big beat makes you weak, knocking down the walls, turning the city topsy-turvy.

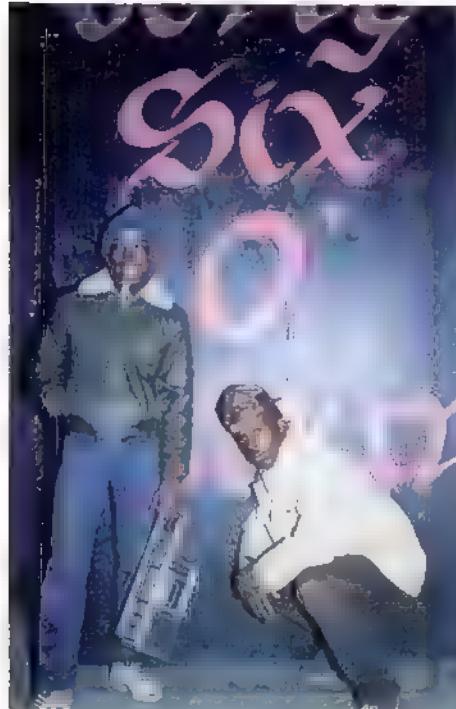
Rap is so immediate in Baltimore because it's the voice of the kids, especially the kids on the corners. It's pontificating soapbox, funky-fresh filibuster, goon-show grandstand, gangster politiks by way of two turntables and a microphone. When Schoolly-D says, "Put my pistol up against his head/I said you sucker-ass nigga/I should shoot you dead," he validates the actions of the trigger-happy teen. It's no wonder this is one of the fastest-selling rap records in Baltimore—it's street simpaticismo, with gusto.

"Sex and horror are the new gods," was the declaration of Frankie Goops to Hollywood in "Welcome to the Pleasure Dome," and it's an apt illustration of the scene tonight in 4604. Mantronix's "Needle to the Groove" is playing, working the mass hypnosis. Maybe the "e" was left off to buffer the cultural shock, but rap is sometimes rape, even though the violence is seductive. It makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, your circulation accelerate, your mouth dry, your genitals burn. And then it knocks you down and tears your insides out. This is the sex, I mean the sensuality, no, I guess I don't know what I mean, because it has centralized into an erotic blur.

Two 13-year-old boys sandwich an 11-year-old girl, all three humping and shaking out the world around them to a pulse that dominates their young lives. The cold, damp dance floor—which thickens its numbers from 50 to 100 kids in less than 20 minutes—looks like a kiddie-porn parade. Then "Needle" segues to "Rock the Bells"—part of rap's adhesive is the seamless transition, the sense of continuum, eternity, living with the beat forever. The boys dismount the girl, form a circle with another group of boys, and do the Baltimore version of D.C.'s "Happy Feet." But instead of shuffling from side to side, they run in place, going nowhere, a pantomime of their own existence. And then in this gaudy, mirrored temple the sex snowballs into a religious ritual, the red stage light flashing like a stop-sign altar: pray—don't pray, dance—don't dance.

The priest, the rabbi, the Dalai Lama of this religion is LL Cool J, using mouth and beat box like stone and mortar, reducing these kids to fine powder. The boys are dancing with each other, the girls by themselves, governed by LL's manifesto. And LL's music doesn't stop: "Bells," "Dear Yvette," "I Can't Live Without My Radio," "I Need a Beat." It warms the crowd in this earthy, cold womb of a

The young killers move like carrion birds on the corners, like vultures flying in a circular death pattern, living out their twisted visions of Al Pacino's *Scarface* and Schwarzenegger's *Terminator*.



Attitude and style at club 4604

dance palace, walks them around like bulldogs on a short leash, until they bark for more.

LL has the same feeling of dread as his male audience. He has the same disdain for women—*So all crabby-looking girls/You must get back/Cause there's a ten-to-one chance/That you might get smacked*, from "Bells"; he has the same disdain for authority on "Radio," turning up his volume way past 10 in the face of a policeman—*I woulda got a summons/But I ran away; he feels the same need to provoke the tough guy— I keep suckers in fear/By the looks on my face*, also from "Radio."

This is a cat with sharp verbal claws, and his rhymes are weapons. Like the kid who probably started shooting at the stage at 4604, LL has something to prove, and he will never be disrespected. His rage caricatures the anger of black male teenagers, a rage that makes punk rock's tantrums look like something from *Captain Kangaroo*. LL shrinks the airwaves, the disco, the world into this insecure little room of his generation, the room with no exit. The only way out is scratching and clawing and maybe shooting.

Inside the club, I meet a kid who I've seen on the

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ON  
THE  
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**Many of the murders are drug-related. The others are the status killings; murder brings you big respect on the street. "You're the man when you kill somebody," says one kid.**



corner of North and Pulaski. I introduce myself and explain that I'm writing an article about the Yo boys. I tell him I want to meet a killer, a guy who's never been caught. He seems excited and says he knows just the person. We leave 4604 and jump in a cab. We're going back to Pulaski. To meet a "Terminator."

**T**he cab pulls up to Pulaski Street. The action on the corner is kinetic, kids in perpetual motion, voices and action jumping back and forth like great sparks from some powerful electrical current. We get out of the cab, trying to dodge the swarm of dope-buying customers and merchants that blackens the dark corner. And then we spot FTD. He's in the same spot, wearing the same clothes, but now he looks even more intense.

"You sure you know him?" I ask.  
"Yeah," insists my connection, whose name I still don't know. "Come with me."  
"You sure?"  
"If you don't, he's gonna think something is up."  
We run across the street. FTD looks me up and down several times. I know he's uneasy. His grip tightens on the flower box.

"Who is he, man? A cop?"  
"No, man, he's just a friend. He's a writer."  
"A writer or a snitch?" FTD cracks the rose box, and inside is a sawed-off shotgun.  
"Can I ask you some questions, man?" I ask nervously.  
"You can't ask me nothin'." His eyes look right through me. "This is my muscle relaxer," he says of the gun. "It's for people who ask too many

*The scene in front of Cyrus Israel's Dayland Records, a center of the street life.*

questions."

"Maybe I should leave," I say.  
"Maybe you should."  
"Ay," pleads my connection, grabbing FTD's hand as he reaches inside the box. "He ain't doin' nothin'." Things aren't going the way we planned.  
"I don't trust him, man," says FTD, growing more and more agitated. "I'll talk to you, but not to him. I won't."  
"Wait for me across the street," says my mediator. They speak for less than 10 minutes, and then FTD goes back up the block. My connection tells me that FTD says he only committed four murders since 1980, and has newspaper clippings to prove it. But the people on the street know better; it's common knowledge on the avenue that several more have tried to challenge the 'D, and they lie in the dirt of the Edmondson Avenue cemetery.

*Sittin' at home one Saturday night  
Puffin' on some cheeba (reefer), feelin' awright  
Then my homee-homee  
Called me on the phone  
His name is Keith-Keith  
But we call him Bone  
He told me 'bout this party  
On the south side  
Got my pistol  
Jumped into my ride . . .*

**D**ark clouds hang low over Baltimore City Jail. Echoing in the vast courtyard are children's voices, children behind iron bars and thick concrete, calling out to their parents below.

"Mama?"

"Yeah, Ronnie?"

"Um, could you bring me my Sergio Valentines next week, and my green Pumas?"

"OK, baby."

"Mama?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry, hear? When I get out, I'm gonna—" "I gotta go, baby, I gotta put my lotteries in."

The waiting room is filled with women in their 30s and 40s and teenage girls. Mothers and daughters, mothers and girlfriends. This place was designed in heartbreak brown. Ugly, depressing wood paneling covers the walls, as does a miserable sepia-dim nicotine mist. Some of the women's faces tell a long and painful story, their eyebrows and mouths knitted in anger, embarrassment, and despair.

Through the dingy windows in the waiting room I can see the endless row of cubicles in the visiting area, where the captive and the free nod and talk in slow motion, somehow acknowledging the futility of trying to cram a lifetime into a flash of 30 minutes.

"Terry Ragin," the correction officer announces, "booth 15."

Nervous energy propels me from the hard plastic seat into the visiting area. Terry had been arrested for the murder of 14-year-old Marcus Alston in December. The Alston murder was one of the first killings that caught my attention. It was particularly vicious, and I had followed the case until Terry turned himself in, after nearly a month on the run. I wanted to get his side of the story.

Terry looks around, curious, hopeful, mixed up, expecting to see a relative or a friend. When he sees me, he gives me a long, strange, and puzzled look. After I tell him who I am, surprisingly, he agrees to talk.

He is a tall, stringbean 18-year-old. Wearing a corduroy Nike cap and blue plaid shirt, he looks like the average teenage boy, not a Yo. His face is childlike, almost Jackson Five cute, but his eyes show nothing, just X-ray beams, like FTD's. I can feel them burning up the base of my skull.

"Are you scared?" I ask.

"Kinda," he mumbles, "but I got a little crew in here, some guys that grew up with me. Ain't nobody tried anything. Not yet."

Just once, his ice-man cover melts down, and I can see the fear in his eyes, the little boy trapped inside a creature of his own design. His underarms have a heavy odor. He looks from side to side. Sweat dots his forehead.

"Why did you turn yourself in?" I ask.

"Why not?" he says almost inaudibly, looking away as he speaks. "I ain't got nothin' to hide. I didn't do nothin'."

"So why did you run?"

"I was scared."

"Of what?"

"Because the boy who got shot, his sister mistook me for somebody else, and she said her family was gonna kill me. Take a contract out on me. I didn't wanna get killed for somethin' I didn't do."

Terry tells me he was thrown out of high school five months ago for fighting, then dropped out of a skills center where he went to get his equivalency diploma. He was rejected for several jobs, so in his abundant free time he hung out at Plato's and Juggernaut's, a haven for rap music. He cracks a big smile when I ask if he can rap. He can't, but loves the beat of the music, because he is a good dancer. Suddenly, he gets cold again, and the giddy warmth of an 18-year-old freezes over into an iceberg. It is a chilling transformation to behold.

"OK, I'm gonna tell you what happened that

## As I'm talking to FTD, who admits to having killed four people, he's getting agitated and reaching into the long flower box in which he keeps a shotgun. "You can't ask me nothin'," he growls.

night. Around 9 o'clock, I was hanging out with my boys Greg, Rodney, and Darnell. We went over to Greg's house to watch some videos. He has one of those VCRs, and we was checkin' out Scarface, plus a couple of nasty movies."

Terry grins after saying this, like a mischievous little kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar, then he summons that arctic restraint.

"We was listening to some music, LL Cool J, Run-DMC, and some others. Greg called up some girls to come over and hang out, too. We waited almost an hour for them, but when they didn't show up, I decided to leave. It was getting late. Greg, Rodney, and Darnell decided to walk me to the bus stop. About halfway up Washington Street, I told them they could go back, 'cause I would be alright. As I was going to the bus stop, I heard this loud bang, and I saw three boys runnin' across Darley Avenue. It looked like one of the boys had a long gun, like a shotgun. Then I saw this girl named Angie that I know. Well, I don't really know her, but I seen her enough to know who she is. I looked down next to her and saw this boy bleeding from his head. She started screaming, 'You killed my brother! You killed my brother! Now my family is gonna kill you!'

"I didn't say nothin'. I just started runnin'. I ran back to Greg's house and told him what happened. Greg got real quiet. I asked him could I stay at his house overnight, just until I could get out of town the next morning, and he said no. Darnell said no,

too. Rodney said, 'Come on, man, you can come up to my house with me. I got an uncle in York, Pennsylvania, and we can stay with him. We'll take the bus early in the morning.' I told Greg to call my mother and tell her I would be gone for while.

"We took a Greyhound at about 7 in the morning. It was real cold, too. When we got up there, Rodney's uncle, Junior, met us. Rodney didn't tell him why we was there. He just told him that we wanted to get away for a little vacation."

*A little vacation.* I remember the police report of Marcus Alston's death. According to eyewitnesses, on the night of December 5, 1985, Marcus Alston's 13-year-old cousin, Melissa Jones, was being pelted with snowballs by a boy named Ronald. When Alston told Ronald to stop, he refused. An argument broke out, then a fight, and Marcus threw Ronald to the ground. When Ronald got up, he cursed Marcus and told him, "You stay right here, 'cause I'll be back with a friend!"

Ronald soon returned, says the police report, with a boy known in the neighborhood as Troy. His real name was Terry Ragin. From under his coat, said witnesses, Terry pulled a long-barreled gun and pointed it at Marcus. "What are you gonna do now?" he reportedly said. Then he pulled the trigger. Marcus Alston died in the street.

Now I look at "Troy," Terry Ragin. Is he lying? I can't tell.

So maybe a killer was on the run—maybe not. Terry's picture was all over the TV and papers in Baltimore, but in York, he and Rodney were having a good time. Lots of parties, lots of girls. He exercised at a gym. A job fell through at Burger King. Still, he was living it up. But the good times had to end. Terry was getting bored. Finally, Rodney's father came and took them back to Baltimore.

"When I got home," says Terry, "my mother told me, since I didn't do it, to turn myself in. She called the police on New Year's Eve. My mother is real religious, and she said if you're tellin' the truth, the truth will win out, because God is truth, and the truth will set you free. And I'm tellin' the truth."

My head is swimming. This kid looks choirboy innocent, but if he is lying, he is a terrifying, manipulative schemer.

"You have a lawyer?" I ask.

"No. My pretrial hearing was January 24, but my legal aid never showed up. My mother went to this one lawyer, but he wants 5 G's. My mother ain't got that kind of money."

Terry pauses and sighs, because the tears in his eyes are almost too strong to hold back.

"Can you get me outta here? I didn't do it, man, I didn't."

I tell him I'll see what I can do and shake his hand, thanking him for his time. Time that was running out, maybe had run out.

On the way home, I notice that the cemetery is right across the street from the jail, and that both structures use the same black bricks, bricks that look as if they were baked in the oven of the most hellish nightmare.

**I**t is 6 that evening and the local news is on. One station reports another murder of another black boy on another black street corner.

Another station has a hot debate on the issue; two black, two white panelists. After a lot of finger-pointing and flushed faces, the white participants imply that this is the blacks' problem. But another channel brings the reality into focus. Earlier in the day, a kid at the Kenilworth School—in middle-class Prince Georges County—was suspended for bringing a .357 Magnum to class. The day before, some boys on the bus to school had taken his lunch money. He brought the gun to protect himself. Kenilworth is an elementary school. The kid was white. And he was only 10 years old.



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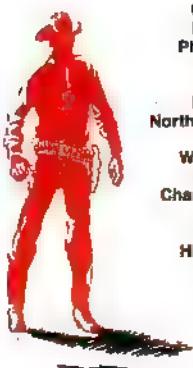
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David Redfern/Reino Ltd.

continued from p. 28

Stones made a movie out of it, featuring Tina Turner and Melvin Belli.

Mick was capable of carrying off the devil-may-care role because it was camp, just like what John Lennon called his "fag dancing." Mick was amused by the satanic schtick. It was very silly even when struck by lightning of heavy Aquarian synchronicity.

Booom.

Mick and the lads became masters of irony. But irony is a stern school and every once in a while the joke was on them. In the classics, irony meant a character speaking more than he knew. Sometimes the Stones seemed trapped in character and unaware of the plot. Sometimes they seemed like they were Their Satanic Majesties; sometimes it seemed they were By Appointment to Her Satanic Majesty.

Sometimes rock 'n' roll reminds me of the pre-Columbian coliseum shows of the Aztecs. There, it was getting a cardiotomy on top of the pyramid for some young kid, not just a standing ovation. But nobody felt sorry for the kid on the pyramid—he'd had all the dope, girls, and flute music he wanted, no work, free motel tab. Rock 'n' Roll Heaven, Aztec Bardo. Sometimes it all seems the same.

But I do think that if the Stones were really the devil, their new video would employ more wealth and taste.

NICE RIMBAUD QUOTE

*A Poet makes himself a visionary through a long, boundless, and systematized disorganization of all the senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons, and preserves their quintessences.... He attains the unknown, and if demented, he finally loses the understanding of his visions, he will at least have seen them! So what if he is destroyed in his ecstatic flight through things unheard of, unnameable: other*

horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the first one has fallen...

The first Romantics were visionaries without completely realizing it: the cultivation of their souls began accidentally: abandoned locomotives still running down the tracks...

—letter, Arthur Rimbaud to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871

SISTER ENDORPHIN

I think the Stones are in some ways this band called the Human Endorphins that put out the sound that got the pleasure pathways of the global brain really wired, silver locomotives running down the tracks of the pleasure pathways and reward system of the pharmaceutical broadcasting system.

Exile on Main Street is like a totally science-fiction blues album, man. It's overblown and it's alright. It kicks ass though it can barely stand. This is the album that makes you wonder if Keith is the Ezra Pound of the Unconscious Mind. (He's not, I thought about it. He's more like the mind of Robert Johnson trapped in the body of Karen Silkwood.)

I still find the Stones highly experimental. I think some of the apparent banality of what they're doing now is really a camp that's very close to the vest. I'm always willing to give them the benefit of the doubt or another spin. Put 'em on the speakers Uhura, just don't let them beam up in person.

THE GLAMOUR OF ANESTHESIA

Michael Ray Richardson of the New Jersey Nets basketball team was banned for life because mandatory urine tests showed that he had relapsed into his cocaine addiction. Richardson is considered to be a bad example for youth by the NBA. Why ban a player for life when you could just give him a lifetime achievement award?

Nils Lofgren, now guitarist with the

continued on p. 73

# BACK SPIN



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**JUNE 1985** Talking Heads, Einstürzende Neubauten, Los Lobos, Calypso, U2, the Smiths, John Fogerty, Billy Joel, Mick Jones, Teenage Sex, Julie Brown, Underground Record Stores, Go Go, 7-11s.

**JULY 1985** Sting, Nick Cave, General Public, Lone Justice, Toure Kunda, Beastie Boys, Muhammad Ali, Pogues, Katrina and the Waves, Nik Kershaw, Athens Scene, The Edge, Murph the Surf, Michel Lemieux.

**AUGUST 1985** Eurythmics, Billy Bragg, Leonard Cohen, Ike Turner, Sonic Youth, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Aerosmith, Creole, Bob Geldof, Fishbone, Eek-a-Mouse, Doppelganger, Meat Puppets, Midnight Oil, Beat Farmers, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Do-It-Yourself Recording, L. Shankar, Twisted Sister, George Burns, Gundalcanal Diary.

**SEPTEMBER 1985** Pat Benatar/Lydia Lunch, New Order, George Thorogood, Chuck Norris, Glenn Branca, Brian Eno, Ruben Blades, Howard Finster, Eno, Screamin' Sirens, Do-It-Yourself Mixing.

**OCTOBER 1985** Keith Richards, D.O.A., David Crosby, Buddy Rich, George Clinton, the Blasters, Emo Philips, James, the Nightingales, Do-It-Yourself Record Label, Models and Rock Stars, Andreas Vollenweider, Throbbing Lobster, Leonard King.

**NOVEMBER 1985** Bruce Springsteen, Jesus and Mary Chain, D.S.T., X, Tom Waits, Miles Davis Part 1, Washington Squares, Yngwie Malmsteen, Steve Reich, the Unforgiven, Mafia.

**DECEMBER 1985** Bob Dylan, 10,000 Maniacs, Hüsker Dü, Sly Stone, Squeeze, Rip Torn, Miles Davis Part 2, Salem 66, Rock Censorship, Minutemen, King, Albania.

**JANUARY 1986** Debbie Harry, Motley Crue, Boris Becker, Punk's Tenth Anniversary, Frank Zappa, Tito Nobile, Mojo Nixon, Ginger Baker, Aimee Mann, CBGB's, Tipper Gore's Diary, Jean-Luc Godard.

**FEBRUARY 1986** Top, Foetus, Nina Hagen, Motorhead, Dead Kennedys, Austin Scene, Waterboys, Communards, Crock, Tony Dorsett, Love Boat Radio.

**MARCH 1986** Big Audio Dynamite, Robyn Hitchcock, Peter Townshend, Young Country Traditionalists, Fear, World Beat, Johnny Thunders, Buster Poindexter, Paul Morrissey, Brave Combo, Redd Kross.

**APRIL 1986** First Anniversary Extravaganza! Dr. Ruth Meets Ozzy Osbourne, Squirrel Nutz, Mantors, LL Cool J, Violent Femmes, Fronk Chickens, Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Ricky Nelson, The Swans, John Lee Hooker, The Residents, David Lee Roth, Fine Young Cannibals, To Live and Die in L.A., Black Flag, Terry Gilliam, Patti LaBelle, College Radio, Meltzer's Rock Memories.

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## CHARLIE SEXTON from p. 48

lights another smoke. Azoff thanked Charlie for being so cooperative.

Charlie is cooperative. He's cooperative and he's lucky and he knows it. He's doing what he's wanted to do since he was a little kid—a *little* kid—and to tell the truth, it's hard not to laugh at these people who ask him interview questions like, "Do you ever wonder if you're missing out on the normal things a kid your age would be doing?"

"They think like I am a Pinocchio-type thing. I could always go back—it's not like somebody's pushin' me across this plank." Besides, don't they understand? He's a rock star. He lives on his own in Hollywood, he's just about to tour Europe and Japan, he has one hell of a contract with one hell of a big record company. His album is number 17 on the *Billboard* chart this week and rising fast. Go find a teenager who wouldn't trade his normal life for that.

And these interviewers are always asking Charlie what he thinks he'll be doing in 10 years, or in 20 years. Even the list of questions the MCA publicity department provided had that one on it—as if a 17-year-old kid doesn't have a hard enough time imagining what it would be like to be 22. "I won't be makin' any movies or anything like that for at least another year or two," Charlie says. "At the very least. I'm just gonna be building that pyramid, basically. Keep puttin' those blocks up until I, you know—until I've built a pyramid. Then what I'll do with the pyramid I don't know. I guess keep livin' in it."

At 17, it's a lot easier to look back. Charlie's mom was, as he says, a single parent, and she always gave Charlie the choice of going out to the clubs with her or not. It wasn't like she was pushing him across the plank or anything—he loved it. And when he got good on the guitar, back around junior high, age 11 or so, she let him move on in to Austin from out in the country and stay with an ex-boyfriend of hers. Charlie booked and managed his own bands even way back then, so none of this business stuff is totally new to him at all. And after a year or two of playing the clubs and then packing up the equipment and getting into bed at four in the morning and then getting up again to go to school—well, it gets old quick. So Charlie's mom let him shitcan the school part and get down to some serious business. And hey, it paid off. Here he is, sitting on the patio of a publicity office at MCA Records, talking about the Charlie Sexton dolls they've already got in Japan when he hasn't even been there yet, talking about why he's decided not to release any color photos of himself. The publicity woman has come up to massage Charlie's neck. When he looks up at her, the light makes his makeup powder stand out all the more and a touch of brown shows at the crown of his jet-black hair. "I always liked black and white more than color," Charlie says. "I think it's just a bit more honest."

**T**here's another old story that fits here. It's less a myth than the other one, although it was written by Chuck Berry, too. As an old story, it's a few years younger than the first one, and as a myth it never quite caught on. Maybe it wasn't as big a pack of lies. Maybe it came to a finish instead of staying nice and open. Maybe Chuck Berry couldn't help but learn a lot in the time between December, 1957 and February, 1960.

This story starts with Mrs. Goode. She withdrew all her savings from the Southern Trust and put little Johnny on a Greyhound bus. He was leaving for the golden West, heading off to make some motion pictures out in Hollywood. He was going to build a mansion too, once he came home. The story doesn't mention whatever happened to his guitar, but it does holler out a new version of that same odd old warning: Bye-bye, bye-bye. Bye-bye, bye-bye. Bye-bye, Johnny. Good-bye, Johnny B. Goode.



Martha Gurion

The only thing like actual information to be gleaned from this affair is that Charlie is getting just a bit weary of questions that link him with such aged name brands as Bob Dylan and Don Henley and Joe Ely.



Martha Gurion

## ROLLING STONES from p. 70

Boss, once recorded a song called "Keith Don't Go," urging Keith Richards not to die. So far the song has been a success even though the album didn't do well. Can you imagine someone recording a song urging you, personally, not to overdose on heroin and cocaine? That's really going to a lot of trouble for someone. I wonder if Keef would write one like that for Nils: "Nils Don't Flip."

### KEITH YOU OLD DEVIL

According to Keith's latest interview in the *NME*, the only interview he considers important is the one in which he's interviewed at heaven's door by old St. Peter.

Imagine that Keith's liver finally gives out and the punky old geezer finds himself at heaven's gate and St. Pedro checks Keith's arms and tells him to get lost because he don't have no tracks. So Keith gets in the elevator and he goes straight to hell. He gets off in hell and the place is packed with good-looking girls and dope dealers and it looks like there's a party going on. Keith runs into Jimi Hendrix and Jimi gives him some skin and takes him over to the bandstand. There's Gram Parsons, Tommy Bolan and Marc Bolan, Janis and Jimbo and Brian Jones, and a lot of other cool cats.

"Wow," says Keith, "I think I'm gonna like hell. Can I sit in?"

"Sure," says Jimi, "we just have to wait for the leader to show up."

Keith notices that the drums are vacant. "Oh here she comes," says Jimi.

Keith looks up and here comes Karen



Michael Putland/Retna Ltd.

Carpenter. She sits down at the drums and picks up the sticks. "OK, boys," she says, "Let's do 'Close to You.'"

That's the hell of it.

### SOME EXTRA IDEAS ABOUT THE ROLLING STONES

1. If you think about it, they're a lot like Picasso.
2. The beginning of "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby? (Standing in the Shadows)" on *Cot Live If You Want It* is the best distortion ever on a record, maybe.
3. Brian Jones was the doll lying face down in the purple frosting on the cake

Eric Clapton (right) presents (L-R) Charlie, Keith, Bill, Ron, and Mick with complimentary Estee Lauder facial . . . er, a Grammy.

on the cover of *Let It Bleed*.

4. Absolutely the best rock band ever.
5. When Mick Taylor joined the Stones, you knew that things were going to be different.
6. When Woody joined the Stones, you knew things were going to be different.
7. *Their Satanic Majesties Request* is a great album no matter what the critics say. They should do one now called *Their Static Majesties Bequest*. Just kidding.

8. Some of the Rolling Stones' most interesting stuff is the non-LP B-sides like: "Who's Driving My Plane?" which was, of course, the B-side of "Have You Seen Your Mother Baby (Standing in the Shadows); "Child of the Moon," the B-side of "Jumping Jack Flash." And "Everything's Turning to Gold," the flip of "Shattered."

9. One thing they didn't mention at the Grammys was that the Stones always had a radical mix.

10. "Paint It Black": This was the first song to mix sitar with Episcopalian themes.

11. Apparently Brian Jones is something of a demigod in certain parts of Morocco. He went there to record the Pipes of Pan of the tribesmen at Jajouka, and jam. He happened to have the same initials as Bou Jeloud, His Bad Self. A new book claims Jones was murdered in his pool.

12. Every time you see the President of the United States, he's wearing a lot of makeup. The first face-lift rumors about Mick went around about the time of the *Exile on Main Street* tour. I think he just got some sleep. He has crow's feet today, and who cares; he looks great.

13. Mick Jagger testifies better than any other white singer, including Frank Sinatra, Van Morrison, Daryl Hall, Tom Jones, and the Righteous Brothers, except for Buster Poindexter.

33. Saying that Keith Richards can't be a great bluesman, being white and maybe a jerk, is like saying that Larry Byrd can't play basketball.



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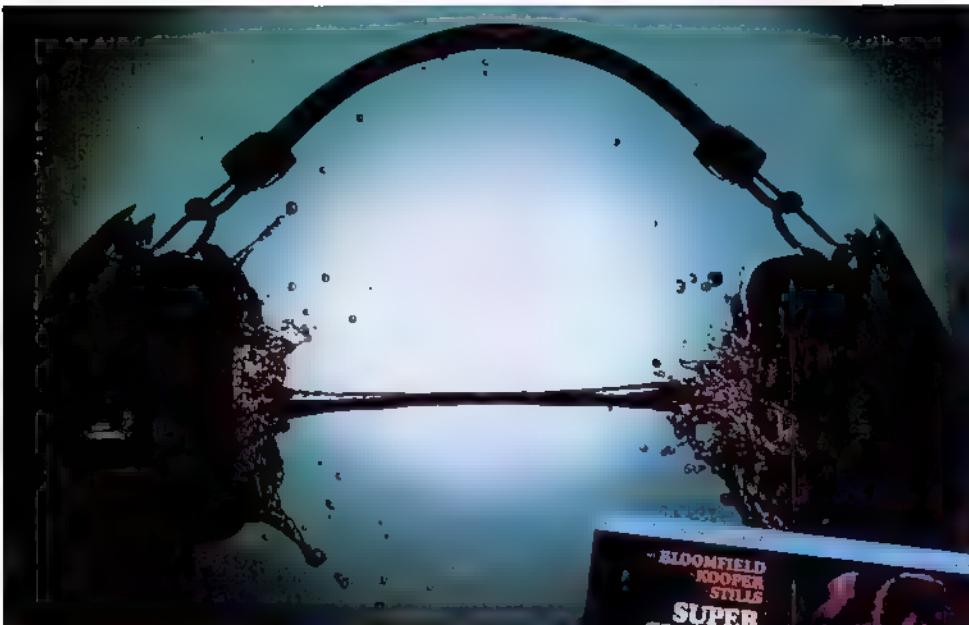
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# moving images

A look at total narcissism, good airplane movies, another Roger Daltrey video, and the MTV image of the month.

CISCO: Hi, I'm Gene Cisco, rock video critic of the *Middletown Daily Mirror*.

EGBERT: And I'm Roger Egbert of the *Middletown Star-Ledger*. This month "At the Videos" we'll be reviewing videos by Heart, the Pointer Sisters, ZZ Top, Eurythmics, the Thompson Twins, Elvis Costello, and Roger Daltrey.

CISCO: Him again?

EGBERT: But first we have a video of one of the songs from *Rocky IV*.

CISCO: What's Jim Morrison doing in *Rocky IV*?

EGBERT: This guy seems like he's going for the Jim Morrison look, but only his hairdresser knows for sure. Actually, this is Robert Tepper doing "No Easy Way Out."

CISCO: He looks authentically '60s.

EGBERT: It is an angry young look, but there's a wimpiness underneath that

## Rocky is very influenced as a fighter by Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini. They both lead with their faces.

shows through. He's more like Boy George; the music is a dead giveaway.

CISCO: Why do you think Stallone chose this guy?

EGBERT: I don't know. Maybe his brother Frank was busy.

CISCO: The James Brown song from that movie is very good, although the chorus sounds exactly like the Village People's "YMCA."

EGBERT: That's funny. I thought it was awfully similar to that Sheila E. song. Wait, now I understand why Sly picked this guy. He and Robert Tepper have similar cheekbones. These intercut dissolves give it away. Stallone may also relate to this guy because he's a total narcissist, wouldn't you say?

CISCO: But so many singers are that it hardly seems to be a distinction.

EGBERT: Maybe that should be our theme this month: total narcissism.

CISCO: Wasn't that our theme last month?

EGBERT: I think this guy is faking so hard that for him it has become reality. That's the real meaning of narcissism. If you remember, Narcissus actually thought his image was somebody else before he fell in love with it.

CISCO: This song is nowhere near as good as "Eye of the Tiger." Do you know how many times Stallone got hit in this

movie? I have the exact figure somewhere. He took twice as many punches as he gave.

EGBERT: Rocky is very influenced as a fighter by Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini. They both lead with their faces. According to Martha Quinn, Robert Tepper is no longer a waiter at the Country Café.

CISCO: They probably made him headwaiter.

EGBERT: He looks snotty enough. When Stallone makes Rocky movies, do you think he actually takes all those shots to the head?

CISCO: He acts like he does.

EGBERT: You know, after you get to be about 35 you can't take those shots to the head anymore.

CISCO: I wonder how much punishment Stallone has really taken in his life.

EGBERT: Not enough, I'd say. Next we have Heart doing "These Dreams." This starts off so spectacularly that I was sure it was a commercial. It starts off with a giant goddess reaching down and rippling the ocean and making waves.

CISCO: It's the Drano goddess.

EGBERT: No, it's the blonde girl in Heart. Now here's the other one — the blackhead.

CISCO: The blonde is dressed like the White Rock lady.

EGBERT: I've heard that the execs at Capitol Records are getting a little worried because Heart is getting up there in years. They still look pretty good to me, but this is rather soft focus. Half the time we're seeing them through clouds of steam or vaseline on the lens.

CISCO: Do you think that's their real hair?

EGBERT: There certainly is a lot of it.

CISCO: Did you know there are 300 people in America with somebody else's heart? That's a lot of transplants. I wonder if any of them are in rock 'n' roll bands.

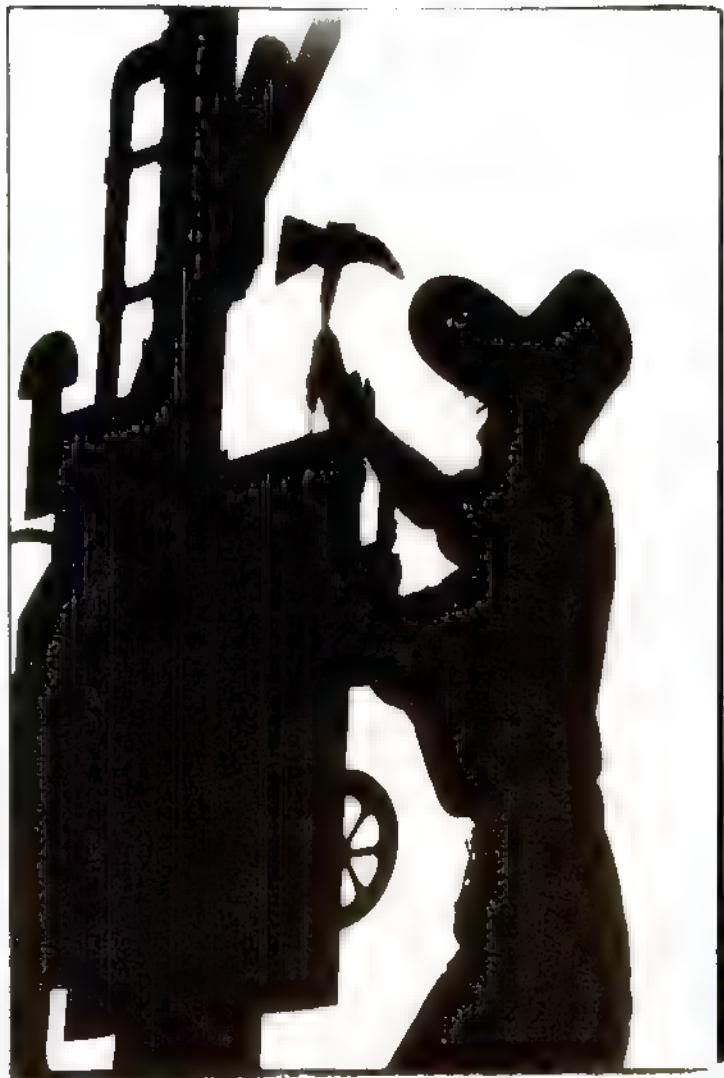
EGBERT: Imagine, one day a young heart is pounding away to Motorhead. And the very next day that same heart is pounding inside some old geezer. I wonder if that old geezer gets a rush when he hears Motorhead on the car radio.

CISCO: What is Heart anyway? This isn't rock 'n' roll.

EGBERT: This song isn't. When they started out they were supposed to be the first hard rock band with girls in it. Now I guess they're Metal Lite. God, this is pretty sick — dozens of disembodied forearms and hands are coming out of the stage. They look like department store glove mannequins. Do you think that's what they think of their fans — just these faceless, bodiless hands reaching out to grab them?

CISCO: Now the hands are reaching out of a pool of water. It looks like *Night of the Living Tidybowl Men*.

EGBERT: Next we have the Pointer Sisters' new one, "Twist My Arms." This is a very cute fashion statement. It has some



Ann Summa

of the best eye makeup and earrings that we've seen, all of the hot dayglo pastels, but what's really unbelievable is . . .

CISCO: . . . that it has those same disembodied hands in white gloves coming up out of the stage.

EGBERT: Maybe surrealism has gone too far.

CISCO: But do you think it's simply a coincidence that month after month you have these things — one month it's trucks, the next month it's glass eyeballs, the next month it's hands with no bodies . . . or do you think MTV proposes themes?

EGBERT: No, Gene, these ideas are just in the air.

CISCO: Some of them should stay there.

EGBERT: Hands aside, I quite enjoyed that one. Next we have ZZ Top's new one, "Stages."

CISCO: It opens up with a video rocketship in space.

EGBERT: This is a continuation of the Afterburner album video saga — remember in the last episode the ZZ car was crushed by Bigfoot and then was reborn as the ZZ space shuttle blasting out of the top of the Great Pyramid?

CISCO: You've got a sharp memory, Rog.

EGBERT: This video is almost entirely

Above: Thompson Twin Alannah Currie objects to this hatchet job.

live concert shots appearing on Sony TVs in orbit.

CISCO: I can't say it's a very interesting video. It's all shots of these satellite TV monitors in space.

EGBERT: Well, there's a knock-off racing wheel in space. That's kind of interesting.

CISCO: What's that?

EGBERT: Instead of lug nuts there's that one big nut with wings on it. You just hit that with a hammer and the wheel comes off easily.

CISCO: That's what I need. My nuts are always way too tight.

EGBERT: I think it's interesting in the context of the video, since the song is about changes of many kinds, including tire changes. That's pretty subliminal.

CISCO: But where are the legendary great-looking girls ZZ Top always has in their videos?

EGBERT: They've been replaced by machines.

CISCO: Next we have Eurythmics' "It's Alright (Baby's Coming Back)." This video has great animation in it.

EGBERT: It's a great song, and Annie looks fantastic.

CISCO: It has a very Japanese look to it.

EGBERT: But at the same time I almost expect to see Heckle and Jeckle get out of that cartoon car.

CISCO: Is it a gold Cadillac?

EGBERT: No, it's a Mercury. You can tell by the air scoops.

CISCO: This is very, very nice. I have a feeling there's even a story.

EGBERT: Yeah, I think she's in some kind of cryogenic suspension on a space voyage or something. Like Sleeping Beauty or the Alien. Then baby comes back and wakes her up with a kiss that's so hot that they both turn into Russian constructivist abstractions. I'd say that was one of the best videos we've seen in a while, wouldn't you, Gene?

CISCO: Yeah, that was up to date. Next we have the Thompson Twins doing "King for a Day." I think if they weren't rock stars they'd be artists. They capture the typical artistic look for today. The black guy looks like Jean-Michel Basquiat. The woman looks like the woman who wears wigs and doesn't let you into the Palladium. And the other guy looks like an artist, too. Or a dealer. And it's an

arty video. She spits out pearls.

EGBERT: They have a robot waiter who wheels in a luncheon tray, and when he picks up the silver lid it turns out not to be lunch at all but the band's money on a plate. But it must not be the currency they wanted. It's pounds and they probably wanted dollars or deutsche märks or Swiss francs. Now it seems that the guys are trying to explain it to the girl but she's having a tantrum on her bed.

CISCO: She can't believe they got the wrong currency again. But now the boys are trying another approach. They're throwing flowers at her and this seems to be working. She's cheering up.

EGBERT: I think the most artistic thing about this is that the backup band consists entirely of Dominican nuns. But I do

## Drummers don't care what the rest of the group looks like as long as they get to wear a T-shirt and black leather fingerless gloves.

like the flower power statement. It's now. I think I've been wrong about this band. I think there may be more to them than their haircuts.

CISCO: Next we have Elvis Costello's "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood."

EGBERT: This is pretty disorienting. There's a total flicker thing going on. Lots of superimposed montage with kidnapping note-type lettering of some of the words of the song. It's hard to watch.

CISCO: I like it, Rog.

The Pointer Sisters are not, nor have ever been, bimbos.

EGBERT: Do you want to have to do that much work when you're watching a video? All those jump cuts. That assault on your senses.

CISCO: I always thought disorientation was what it was all about.

EGBERT: If so, this has achieved what it's all about. I must say it's disorienting in an esthetically coherent yet helter-skelter tasteful form.

CISCO: It's really just a light show.

EGBERT: Do you think the bass player is in fact a bass player or a high-fashion model? She hasn't made eye contact once. Sometimes I think I was even more wrong about Elvis Costello than I was about Annie Lennox.

CISCO: I always thought he was too good to ignore. He's a real poet. It's an interesting video. The only things you see, you see so that you can see the light on them. The only reason Elvis was in the video was so they could reflect some red light off of him.

EGBERT: God, next we have Roger Daltrey's "Quicksilver Lightning." How many videos can this guy have? Every time we sit down to work there's a Roger Daltrey video.

CISCO: Yeah, we always close the show with a Roger Daltrey video. Doesn't he know we don't like his videos?

EGBERT: Some people can't take a hint.

CISCO: Maybe we should like this one.

EGBERT: Well, so far it's not that bad. It's like an episode of *Fame*.

CISCO: Maybe this is from *Quicksilver*, the bicycle movie.

EGBERT: I just saw another bicycle movie on the plane — *American Flyers*. I though I'd hate it but I didn't mind it at all.

CISCO: I saw that on the plane, too. Did you rent the sound?

EGBERT: Yeah, I always do. It helps me not be afraid of death.

CISCO: Nothing serious could happen in the middle of a movie like that.

EGBERT: Well, I wonder how many planes have crashed in the middle of the movie. I wonder if movie information is contained in the black boxes they retrieve after crashes.

CISCO: All of the airlines should show rock videos like Virgin Airlines does.

EGBERT: If they did they'd probably all be Roger Daltrey videos. You know, some videos might make you more afraid of dying. Like this one, for example. But you know what I've noticed in watching movies on airplanes? In *American Flyers* the race takes place on these cliffside roads in the Rockies, and I got totally acrophobic. I can look out the plane window all day, but I can't watch it in the movie. I couldn't even stand the airplane flying back and forth in *Prizzi's Honor*.

CISCO: Flying in airplanes doesn't bother me except when I'm flying over a bridge. I'm afraid of bridges. Well, Rog, it's time for us to catch our flight back to Middletown.

EGBERT: Next month, we'll be back with videos shot from the air and on top of things. See you then "At the Videos."

Gene Cisco and Roger Egbert travel in the smoking section with Scott Cohen and Glenn O'Brien.

## LIFE'S A SCREAM WITH SAM KINISON

Everybody loves impressions, right? Right? Here's my Rodney Dangerfield anyway:

"I don't get no respect. No respect at all."

No good? How about this Steve Martin?

"Well, excuuuuuse me!"

Okay, I'm sorry. Steven Wright, perhaps?

"It's a small world, but I wouldn't want to have to paint it."

Last year's model. But hold it, check out this Sam Kinison person: "AAAAAAAGGGHHHHHH!!"

There you have it: The Scream. And kids, don't try this at home—it's a tough one to mimic. David Letterman tried it recently when Kinison was on *Late Night*, but he just couldn't capture the horror embodied in the demonic 32-year-old comedian's angst-ridden, guttural bellow from the depths of hell. He's obviously getting ready to get used to it, though, and so should you, because singles bars the world over may soon ring with that therapeutic primal scraw. In addition to his Letterman spots (hey, Dave even *pans* the maniac), Kinison is featured monthly on *Saturday Night Live* and has snagged a juicy bit part in John Landis's upcoming comedy western, *Three Amigos* (which stars Steve Martin, Martin Short, and Chevy Chase). To top it off, the Los Angeles Comedy Store vet also recently made a successful debut at Manhattan's own casbah of comedy, Carnegie's. From such moves a career in comedy is constructed.

Kinison is a member of that loose group of comedic new-breeders who have relegated material about mothers-in-law and crab grass to the Eddie Cantor comedy archives. These guys "do comedy" that is mainly about comedy. Of course they still tell jokes (relationships, current events, and drugs have replaced wives and alcohol as catch topics), but the work of such performers as Jay Leno, Steve Wright, Emo Phillips, and even spiritual leader Robin Williams displays irony über alles.

With Kinison, another important influence must be added to the standard roster: religion. His parents were ministers, and the stout maniac was himself a non-denominational preacher for seven years in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "I guess my main comedy influences are Jesus, rock 'n' roll, and ex-wives," he says. "In that order." His stage act—punctuated at regular intervals by The Scream—wallops chuckle-seekers upside the humor control center with the comedy equivalent of Motorhead and Edvard Munch rolled into one. Indeed, blasphemy and the veneer of misogyny ("I know what turns Mr. Hand into Mr. Fist") are offered as well, but when asked, Kinison without hesitation offers this simple job description: "spiritual adviser." Unlike other great comedic ironists of our era, he considers himself truth-teller par excellence.

So give with the truth about The





#### Scream, Sam.

"I was driving to a Los Angeles club, and my girlfriend and I were having a fight. You know how you get so mad you just want to hit something? I think: I'll just give the windshield a pop. I didn't expect to crack the fucking thing all the way across. It made me even madder because now it was going to be another 200 bucks on top of this fucking ridiculous argu-

**"I guess my main comedy influences are Jesus, rock 'n' roll, and ex-wives. In that order."**

ment. So I get there, go right on stage, and I look down—still trying to fight this fucking rage—and there's this kid who's gotta be 21 or 22 with a beaming little I've-never-been-fucked-over-in-my-life face. So off the cuff I said, 'Are you married?' 'No.' I didn't think so. But if you ever consider it, remember this face.' I just took it out on this kid, his hair flew back and he had to check his face for burns. It was just like jet fuel. And it became a trademark."

The Scream. A trademark. A hook. Something to separate a comic from his herd. Something to get on everybody's nerves after a while. Something a comedian might end up carrying around for the rest of his career. Man, it must get old. But for Sam Kinison, The Scream is his cross to bear, the truth that must be transformed.

"The Bible put it the best way: The truth shall make you free. The truth is like that; it makes you, it changes you. You don't have any choice about it."

*The family that screams together, redeems together. Comedian Sam Kinison (right) with niece. Say "AAAAAGGHHHHHHH!"*

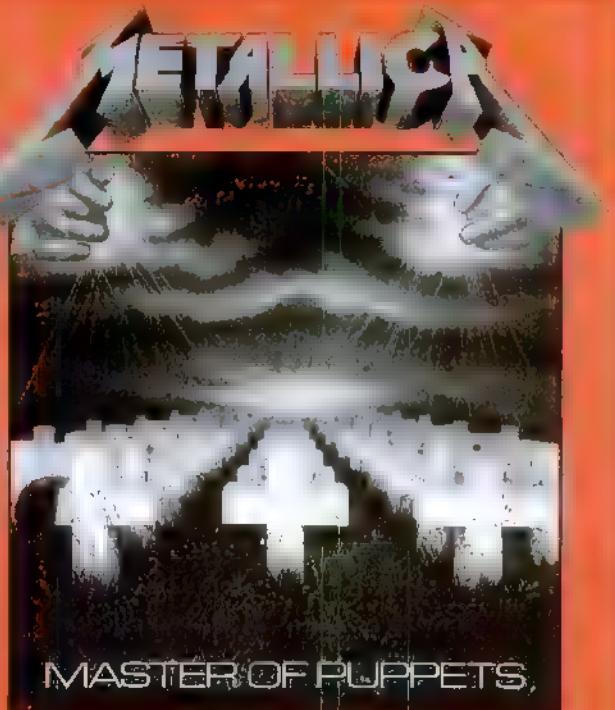
But mightn't the truth have created a monster?

"It's hard not to ham The Scream up now that everybody's into it. But I couldn't have created a worse fuckin' logo for myself. I told Robin Williams, 'I never want to hear you bitch about "nanoo-nanoo" again, OK?' People come up to me on the street and go 'AAAAAGGHHHHHHH!' It's like being ET. People say, 'He's over here! AAAAGGHHHHHHH!' I try to get away from it, but it's like having packs of rabid dogs after you. I should have just created a logo where somebody comes up and throws a glass of water on me."

In another sense, Kinison is the comedy equivalent of Philip Glass. A comedy minimalist, he's like the strange savant on the next bar stool who juggles a relatively small number of themes, only with the timing of, well, a professional comic, until a kind of catharsis is reached. Marriage, Jesus, heaven/hell, political nihilism—all interrupted at regular intervals by you-know-what.

Other hints as to just what exactly motivates the stout, secularized comedian are suggested. Kinison defines hell as "being trapped in a relationship with someone you don't love, without the courage to tell them; you end up sleeping a lot," while heaven is "that magical time when you're just falling in love and nothing else matters but each other." Another major influence, not so strangely enough, is David Janssen as "The Fugitive": "Every week William Conrad would come on and say, 'How long can the search for truth go on before the search destroys the man?'" Love on the run—it's always a scream.

—Richard Gehr



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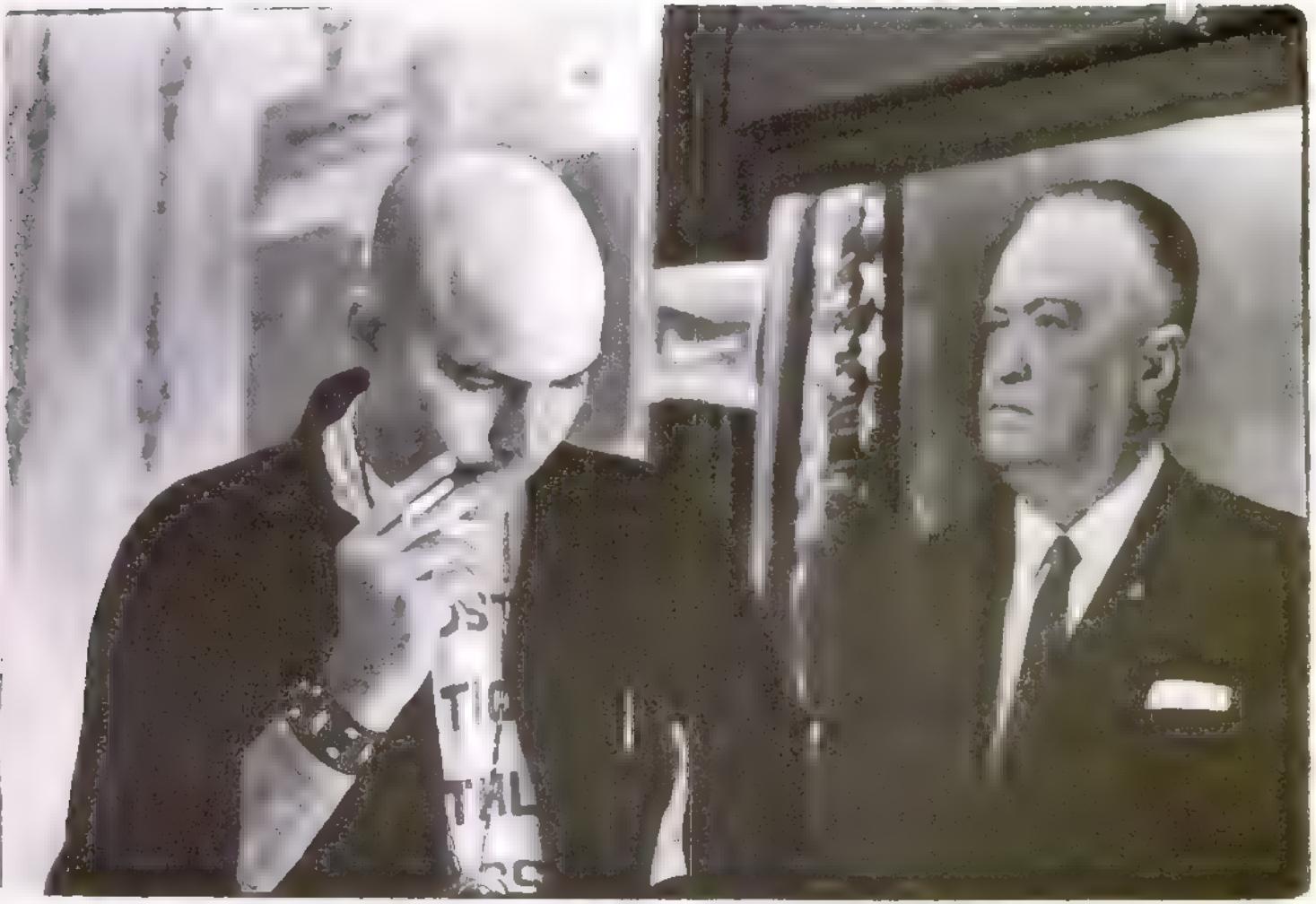
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David Frazee

## "With kids today it's different. They act like I'm from some other planet."

HUNTER THOMPSON from p. 52

thing started." We sit down at the kitchen counter, and I take out my tape recorder. He claps. "Yeah, let's get started. What do you want to talk about?"

"You've upset the bus on many a political campaign. Who's got the best shot at being the next president of the United States?"

Without batting an eye he says right back, "Richard Milhouse Nixon. We're talking winter book. I make him my winter-book favorite. Who's a better bet right now? Bush? You kidding? Teddy's gone. Jack Kemp? Bill Bradley? Cuomo? I see your twisted smile, but just think about this. Nixon's clawing to get back. You can almost hear the scratch marks, and he's not going to rest until he's back where he thinks he should be. I miss the bastard. That's the guy we need."

"Need for what?" I ask.

"For Saturday Night Live. I was talking to Laila last night. That's her department, arranging for Saturday Night's hosts. Nixon's made to order. I gotta call her."

For years Thompson despised Nixon and knocked his brains out, but a change seemed to come about, and it is reflected in Hunter's piece called "Presenting the Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968

Model)." He's on the campaign trail with Nixon in New Hampshire in 1968, and he has somehow wangled a ride back to the airport in the car with the next president. Nixon is talking to him:

"You know, the worst thing about campaigning for me is that it ruins the whole football season. If I had another career, I'd be a sportswriter or a sportscaster."

I smiled and lit a cigarette. The scene was so unreal, I felt like laughing out loud—to find myself zipping along a New England freeway and relaxing in the back seat, talking football with my old buddy, Dick Nixon, the man who came within 100,000 votes of causing me to flee the country in 1960."

I think they became kindred spirits when Hunter discovered that Nixon was a knowledgeable football nut just like him. That took some of the curse off.

"How about your friend Gary Hart?" I ask.

"Hart? There weren't enough votes in the unions to elect Fritz Mondale, and there will never be enough yuppies to elect Hart. They are fickle and greedy, prone to panic like penguins, and naked of roots or serious political convictions. Jesse Jackson can crank more energy and loyalty and action out of 10 people on any street corner in East St. Louis than Gary Hart could every hope to inspire in a week of huge rallies in New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh."

The phone rings, and he answers it briefly. "A friend of mine, a local, coming up for a few minutes . . . Hey, why don't you do Jack Nicholson? He'd be a good piece for you."

"I'd like to," I say, "but I don't know him, and he's as elusive as you are."

"I've talked to him about you. He knows who you are, I'll get him for you."

"Good," I say, "but let's get this one finished. Tell me about the drug culture."

"There's no more drug culture. It's just big business, a foul business. I grew up in the drug culture in the '60s. It was a pleasant pastime for good buddies and fellow travelers. Money had nothing to do with it. I never found that the things I did ever caused me any great grief. They did put a certain stigma on my rep, but if I did half of the stuff they say I did, I'd be dead."

He pulls up his sweater. "Look at this." He flashes a lean, washboard abdomen. He's six-foot-three, weighs 190, and is an impressive specimen at 47. Now he looks at me sideways and is quiet for a few beats. Then he says, "I know you, Harold. I know what you've been doing all these years, and you look as fucking healthy for your age as anybody. Now tell me. Should we have abandoned all that great fun we had?"

He says this kind of wistfully, and I'm getting his vibrations. I'm thinking of the exotic places where our paths have crossed, like the gambling joint in Kinshasa, Zaire, a hangover from the old Belgian Congo. It was like Rick's Café, the faded joint Humphrey Bogart ran in Casablanca, only sleazier: CIA guys masquerading as Peace Corps workers; vamps of all colors; agents and spies from half a dozen countries; gambling, plotting, intrigue.

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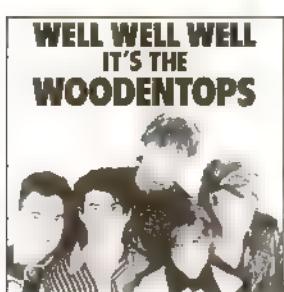
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## "It's Wide...It's on UPSIDE!"

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If you were a friend of the owner's, he'd send one of his boys out to the fringe of the jungle, and he'd be back in an hour with a shopping bag full of buds—pungent, green dynamite—five bucks. One night Hunter threw a whole bagful of buds into the pool at the Hilton International, then dove into the water to be with his friends.

Hunter's eyes seem far away. He takes a long draw of Chivas. When I ask him about his beef with Gary Trudeau and his "Doonesbury" comic strip, Hunter pouts. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Just fill me in. Wasn't there a character in the strip named Duke, one of your pen names, and wasn't it based on your alleged lifestyle?" He nods. "And didn't most of the people who read the strip assume the character was supposed to be you?" Thompson is nodding like a guest on *What's My Line*. "And isn't Gary Trudeau a close friend of yours?"

He breaks his silence. "Never met him, never even seen him . . . he's too small to see. He claims he made the character up himself . . . had nothing to do with me . . . it was his own invention." Hunter starts scribbling on a piece of notepaper. "Gotta make sure this is accurate. Here."

I can't make out the writing. I ask him to read it into the tape recorder. He starts off in a stentorian tone: "I have to live with these rumors. Look at that wretched little comic strip . . . that thieving, chicken-shit dwarf. I feel sorry for his parents. They worked and sacrificed to put him through Yale, and all he learned was to live like a leech and a suckfish on other people's work. It's a shameful thing, and I know he's embarrassed by it."

"What about your new book?" I ask.

"Oh, it's a monster. I was working on it for six months around San Francisco when this column project came up. You knew I was the night manager of the O'Farrell Theatre, the Carnegie Hall of public sex in America."

"Yes, I heard. I've been wondering what the night manager does."

"Well, I prowl the catwalks . . . see that the lighting is right . . . and, uh . . ." He seems stumped. "And drool all over those sexy, naked young girls?" I add.

"No, no, nothing like that," he answers quickly. "This was serious business. Jim Silberman, who runs Summit Books for Simon and Schuster, has been immensely patient. I took a half-million-dollar advance, and don't ask me where the money is."

"When is the book due?" I ask.

"Last year," he says.

"Do you still do the college lecture tour?"

"I average about two a season. You know, when I first started out on the circuit 10 years ago, I was talking to my peers, as it were, people who had shared common experiences. But with the kids today, it's different. They act like I'm from some other planet. Their first questions are, 'Is it really true?' or 'How do you get away with that stuff?'

"I feel sorry for some of those poor bastards I talk to . . . I can almost feel their frustrations. They've never had that kind of fun . . . they don't know . . . It's like me telling you about my previous life in China when I lived in Peking . . . in Shanghai . . . ah, that good old Boxer Rebellion.

"But the questions can get profound—like, 'What's your opinion of the validity of suicide?' A favorite one seems to be, 'Who are the three most important men of your time?'"

"Who are they?" I ask.

"Muhammad Ali, Fidel Castro, and Bob Dylan."

"You want to give me a rundown on that rating?"

"Ali is one of the true heroes of our time. He spoke up in the '60s and stood his ground. He also paid his dues without a whimper. Castro has been running his country for 26 years although everybody's tried to get him knocked off, from the Kennedy brothers to the Mafia. And no matter what you hear in this country, his people love him down

there. He's a hell of a leader.

"Bobby Dylan is the purest, most intelligent voice of our time. Nobody else has a body of work over 20 years as clear and as intelligent. He always speaks for the time."

Hunter puts his drink down and goes to answer the door. He admits his friend Tex from down below, then goes to get his camera. I explain to Tex what the pictures are for, and he says he knows the game. He'll take the pictures. He shoots Hunter at the typewriter, guzzling a drink, wearing the floor-length Indian headdress—Hunter is moving around like a Ford model.

Tex asks, "How many shots did you have in here?" "Twenty-four," says Hunter. "It was a fresh roll."

"Seems like we've done more than that. I can't tell. Better have a look." He cautiously opens the camera. "Shit, man, you got no fuckin' film in this camera," Tex says eloquently.

Thompson gulumphs over like a bewildered ostrich. "No film!! . . . Shit!" He looks over to me to cop a plea. I give him a sneaky smile and he knows exactly what I'm thinking—the old no-film-in-the-camera caper. "Playing games, Hunter?"

"I wouldn't do that to you. I swear I thought there was fresh film in the camera. We'll get more film and do it tomorrow night. I promise."

I return to the mountain the next night to wind this thing up, but there is a two-hour delay. In the Thompson household, only first-strike and avalanche have priority over basketball and football games. Hunter demands action wherever he is, and this is action for him because he's involved. He's betting on most of the games. The Louisiana-Memphis State game has just started and I have to wait for the whistle to blow to get a word in.

Thompson is nursing his Chivas Regal. His face is animated and there is a kid's gleam in his eye. His team is winning. It's 12 years now since he jumped into the pool that night in Kinshasa. Considering that he's galloped through those 12 years like a guy riding a wild bronco, he hasn't changed all that much.

It's still fun and games to Hunter. He seems to have friends no matter where he goes, and when he hits town, it's New Year's Eve every night while he's there.

His mountain is his sanctuary. That's where the brain and the arteries are given a chance to be restored to their normal functions. Not that he lives up there like a monk, but it's far from the lifestyle his cult likes to think it is.

But what the hell has he been doing up on the mount all this time? *The Great Shark Hunt* was published in 1979 and it was a big winner. A novel, *The Curse of Lono*, came out in '82, a best-seller for a short while, but far from his best work. He did several magazine pieces for *Rolling Stone*, where he was a pillar for many years, but it was obvious that this medium isn't much fun for him anymore. He has spent a year playing around with his new book, and has now become a newspaper columnist.

The Thompson cultists have been bemoaning the scarcity of their hero's product. They want to know why he hasn't been up there beating that typewriter and meeting those deadlines. If he were the kind of guy who could settle down and hack away at his typewriter merely because he was committed to his craft, he wouldn't be Hunter Thompson.

Strange. The followers adopted him because they discovered this wild writer, their kind of guy, a rugged individualist with a weird sense of humor and a lifestyle that so titillated the uninitiated that the stories and gossip became an introduction to his work. Now they want to reform him. That's never going to happen, but if it did it would be a shame because it would be the end of a rare species.

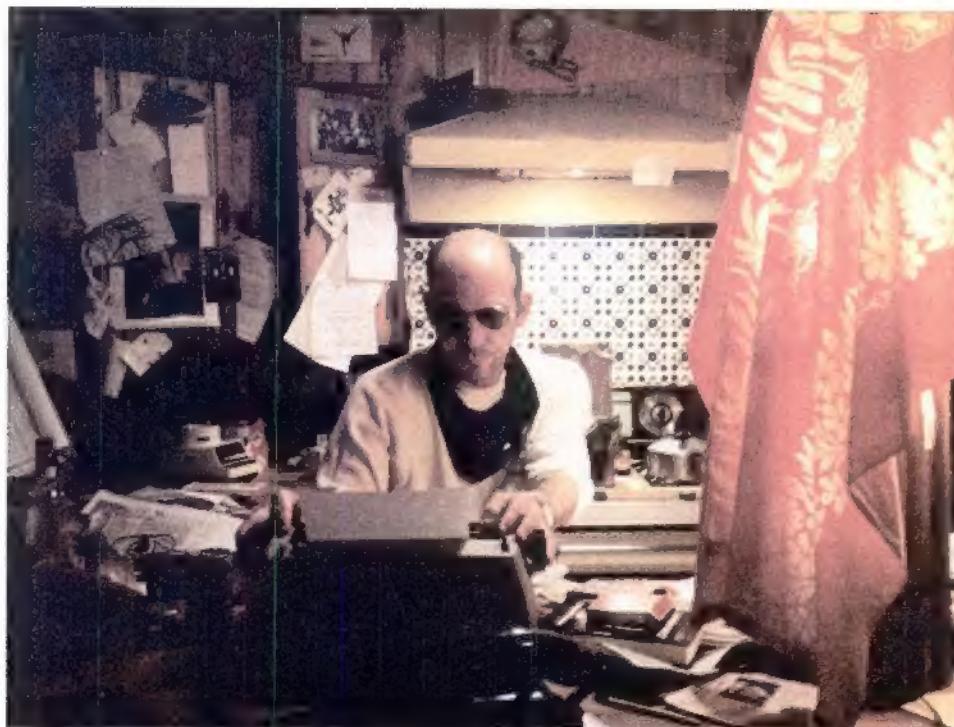
There's only one.

Thompson paid his dues in his early years, writing for obscure publications for little money and sometimes for free, but he became a pro in a hurry when the money started to roll in. If there has been a lack of motivation in Hunter's drive to enrich and fatten his body of work, it might be that the wolves at the door aren't as hungry any more.

He's had some good touches over the past decade. A bundle from Universal Pictures for episodes of his life, made into *Where the Buffalo Roam*. It has become a cult movie, it was that bad, but Bill Murray turned in a remarkable portrayal of Thompson. There's been the income from some very profitable best-sellers, plus the hefty advance from the new, unfinished book.

The basketball game is almost over now, but Thompson doesn't budge until the final whistle. Then he gets his camera, and this time I check it for film. He goes through all the same poses as the night before, with Maria doing the shooting. When

**I tell Mike I was just up at Thompson's house but couldn't rouse him. "Did he shoot at you?" Mike asks complacently.**



Mario Khan

Thompson at work, writing in his kitchen

we're finished, he says he thinks this exhausting work has earned us a nightcap at the Tavern, so down the mountain we go. It's about five below, and Hunter is wearing shorts.

There are several "final" nightcaps, but I have to catch a plane in the morning. Ten minutes after they call a cab for me, a wild-looking guy walks into the place. Thompson walks over to him and starts talking. I don't know what he is saying, but whatever it is, I can see it's something intense. Then he comes back to me. "That's Weird John, your driver," he says.

"What were you just telling him off about?" I ask.

"I was merely telling him to be careful . . . that you were a good friend of mine . . . and that if anything happened to you, I would kill him."

On that warm, happy note, I took off from Woody Creek and headed back to the mundane.

# My Birthday

Whatever May 10  
birthday boys Fred Astaire,  
Donovan, Sid Vicious,  
and our author have in  
common, it sure ain't  
written in the stars.

**O**K. On side two of the Jim Morrison poetry album, *An American Prayer*, right after his only sing-song on the disc, "Roadhouse Blues," there's this great exchange between him onstage at some concert and a perky, eager-to-please fan person down in the seats: "Listen, listen," he begins, "I don't know how many of you believe in astrology . . ." At which point she, the fan person, sighs, croons, like an uncoached shill at a '67 Zappa gig, "You're a Sagittarius!"

"That's right, baby" — credit where due — "I am a Sagittarius, the most philosophical of all the signs."

She, louder this time, honing in on some my-t-good superstar pecker-meat: "I know — so am I!"

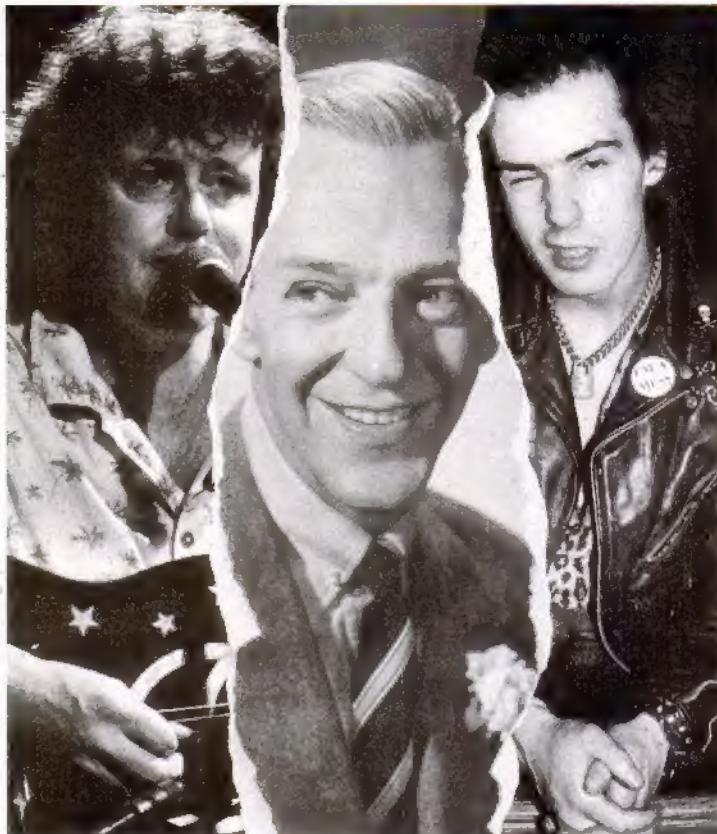
"But anyway" — heh heh heh — "I don't believe in it."

Fuggit (but ne'er say die): "I don't either!"

Which is where I chirp in, every time I hear it, *That makes three of us!* — 'cause it does.

I don't believe! I don't believe! — and even if, for reasons of brain damage, moisture-grape expedience, or despair, I were ever to even voice belief (in the poetry/causality of birth-date-coded intrastellar b.s.), I trust I would, après sexual whoopy, have sufficient non-damage to reject same posthaste. "Godhead is tyranny" — some Frenchman said that; all theisms, mono-, poly-, or pan-. And if you're going to toss religion out the window, then how 'bout the frigging planets, moon, and stars? Astrology is like going to a shrink to pledge neurotic allegiance to your ma and pa. Free me, oh free me, from the spell of Universe! — offer me not constellations as my chains — etc., etc., yippity-yay-hey... but I don't believe it, not for a sec.

And I think what I buy least about the whole trip is all this twelveness crap. Finitude. Although, I dunno, maybe 12 is actually kind of a huge number when it comes to earth-person taxonomy, lo, y'know, pigeonholing, categorizing "man." You read Rex Stout, Frinstance,



Randy Jay Martin [left]

Article by Richard Meltzer

or Ross MacDonald, Georges Simenon, Ed McBain, and a guy'll crease his brow at most this way, that way, or the other — that's three. Three creasings, three indicators, three basic types (of persons who crease). Or you can be the sort that prefers to fuck standing, sitting, kneeling, crouching, lying, flying, or swimming — that's seven. So maybe 12 is like I say, immense. Maybe "too finite" is the wrong, the polar-opposite wrong take. Have persons even got that much variety — in any dept.?

Dunno.

Nor do I in fact particularly "know" the signs, even just their names, like all 12 of 'em. I mean if you pointed a gun at my head, gave me half an hour, I could probably come up with 10 or 11. But dates, sequence, nah, and import — forget it. Libra, for inst, what the fuck is Libra? And Sagittarius, even with the throw-in of it being Jimbo's one and only, I still dunno, is Sagittarius the Goat? All I even half-know is my own whatsis, Taurus ("stubborn" — isn't that the shtick? — "bull-headed"), and the one everybody half-knows, the "sex sign," Scorpio.

So, right, all I am is a crackpot, □

know-nothing, a good-for-naught mocker and fuddydud. I pee 'n' shit on the zodiac just because it's . . . there. All this sound, fury, tinkle, plap, and all I really know is my birthday, May 10, the one I share with:

Fred Astaire  
Sid Vicious  
Donovan.

The four of us — ain't we neat? Luv that Calendar Dada! Womb-drop according to the laws of chance! Take that, astro-fornicators!

Fred, aka Frederick Austerlitz, that subtlest of whitebread hoofers and crooning superstar of *Silk Stockings*, the only Cole Porter-scared picture worse than *At Long Last Love*, a harmless skinnyboy the gals still love . . . the late Sid, aka who remembers, razor nicks and cuts about the forearm and biceps, a credible interpreter of Frank Sinatra, framed accused slayer of Nancy Spungen, he who did not brush teeth . . . Donovan, aka "The Chameleon," a folkie, then a parody of a folkie, then a psychedelic wagwit and showbiz pickleherring, the original David Bowie, he wore a dress as early as '68 . . . and me, aka "R." Meltzer, aka Borneo Jimmy and Audie

Murphy, Jr., pulp scribbler and hepcat from heck, boxing historian, DeNiro look-alike, author of this piece, and seeker of the end of this paragraph . . . and what have we got, pray tell, in common — aside from hot steamy Augusts when our moms went and whoopeed w/out contraceptive oop-poop-a-doo?

Not much.

How much access, in fact, does a hot 'n' random slip-slide in August actually provide us, both singular and plural, to any and all Stations of the universal Bull? Could each or any of us, for inst, making uttermost use of our personal/universal mettle, with or without guns at our head, even possibly enter the bullish lifespan of each of the others, their y'know creative mindset and whatnot, with an eye toward actually remotely participating in their Taureated yet highly eteaterated "thing"?

Whew — □ tough question. Lemme think.

I think not.

To wit: Sid. Could I, in my wildest imaginings, imagine myself playing bass for the Pistols, breathing new life into tired, overrated Eddie Cochran tunes? Yes I could. But Freddy and Donovan, no, I'm afraid not, pardon me as I stifle a chuckle — heh heh — no.

Fred's turn. Again yes. With practice, lots of practice, I could indeed imagine tripping the light, fox-trotting Ginger from hither to yon. Sid and Don: unlikely.

Donovan? We all, I think, could wear our love like heaven. (But Sid would also wear a swastika.)

Me? No way. None of 'em could, or let's say would, write *The Aesthetics of Rock* (1970) or *Guide to the Ugliest Buildings of Los Angeles* (1984). (The work's too hard, the pay's too low.)

So what have we got, we've got inconclusive. You couldn't prove dick from the info at hand. Why this May joker stumbles down this long & winding path and that May joker down that — it beats me, truly. (One of the so-called "mysteries.") If I were a betting person I'd bet my wallet or purse, but not my car, on "E": environment. But such is mere surmise; please don't quote me.

It's always unfortunate when you can't take the back page of SPIN to the bank, so to speak, to use it to get laid or cuss the establishment. This has been such a time: a time for shallow, pea-brained entertainment. Trite, pathetic, bathetic fun. I've had fun, you've had fun, and if you haven't, fuck you, it's my birthday. Lots of candles and so much mischief I feel like a kid again. I think I'll go play Jim's record, the part right after "I don't believe it" where he says, "I think it's a bunch of bullshit." Hey, I'm a bull! — and bull dootz is just my kind.

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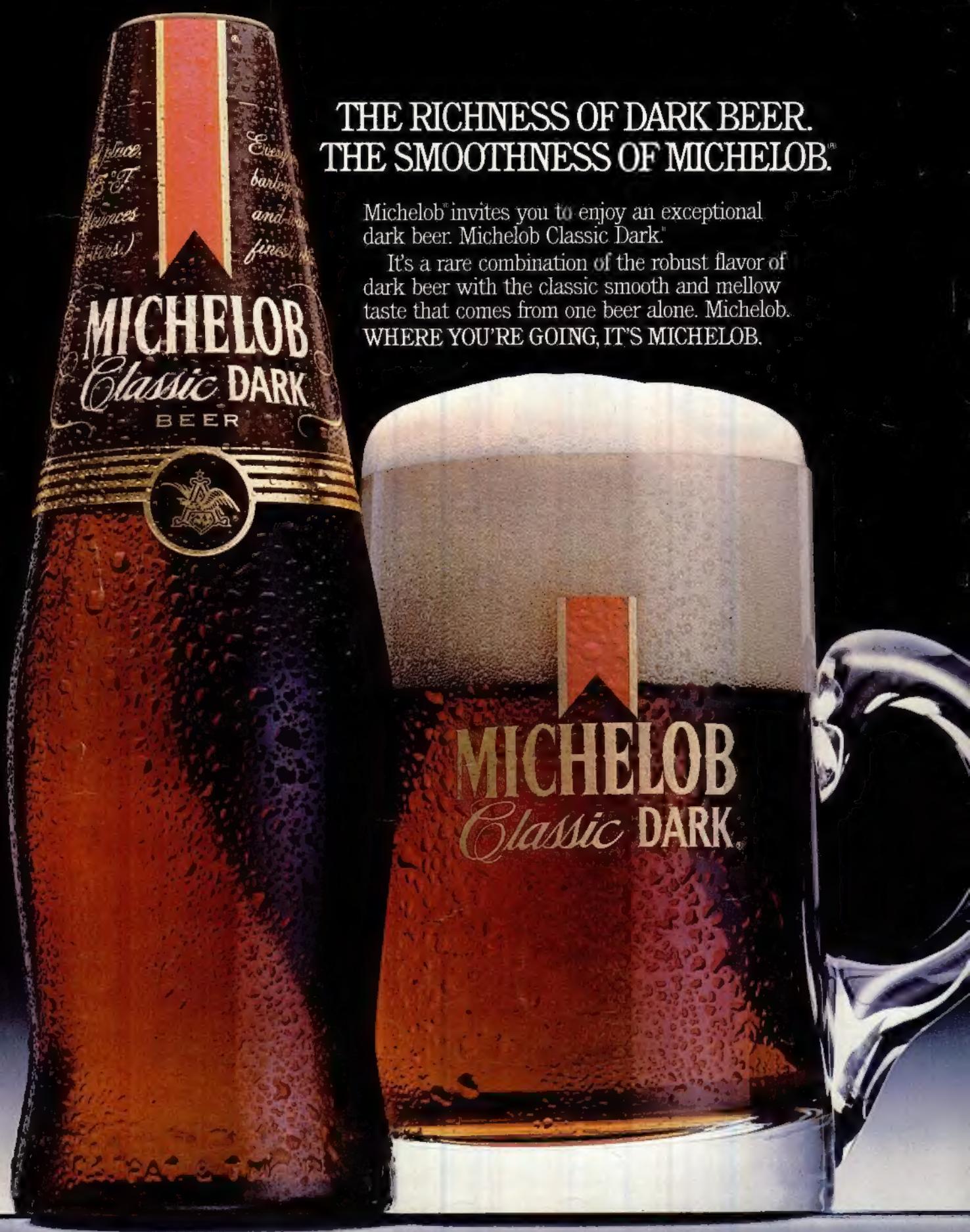
A photograph of three young adults—two women and one man—smiling and laughing while partially submerged in water. They are wearing dark swimwear. The background is a blurred blue, suggesting a pool or ocean.

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